

BLUE
PETE'S
DILEMMA

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LUKE
ALLAN

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HERBERT
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BLUE PETE'S DILEMMA

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Blue Pete, secretly chosen by the Mounted Police to capture an Indian murderer, in his characteristic way picks up the trail and follows it into the mountains. He becomes involved in a bank-robbery that earns him a new and implacable enemy who dogs his path throughout the chase of the murderer—a perilous, unrelenting chase in the depth of winter. Disguised as an Indian, Blue Pete moves from tribe to tribe, helped and hindered by the red men. He faces zero cold, wild animals, and flying bullets, and all the time he must keep secret the task he works at.

Finally, he faces a dilemma where duty and instinct struggle for mastery.

Another magnificent story of the inimitable Blue Pete, whose exploits have thrilled tens of thousands.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BLUE PETE: OUTLAW

BLUE PETE BREAKS THE RULES

BLUE PETE PAYS A DEBT

BLUE PETE'S DILEMMA

by

LUKE ALLAN

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*All the characters in this book are imaginary and have
no relation whatsoever to any living persons*



THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN
COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

BLUE PETE'S DILEMMA

CHAPTER I

UNEASY INDIANS

AS he drove his detached staff from the colony circulating over the spotted world in the Mounted Police bus, he looked out at ranchers for a few moments, and finally returned home to the Mounted Post. Further extended travelling would mean a winter storm that had developed against the coming commercial freight carriers of Medicine Hat for thirty miles from the nearest gas, food, or refreshment at the distance of a goodly period of time.

Unusually much business must have caused a tragedy. So late as the window was obstructed the fire had acquired sufficient rights with no escape and help or investigation. Now and then the fire was fading more with a faint but less suggestion the Inspector had confidence if the fire had nothing drastic had ever been done about it. His person however was in a different class from the window it was an area of investigation denied them to be possible with tragedy itself.

He saw the fire was figure seated behind the desk betrayed no sign that he was aware of the fire's existence. If further need was required then the Inspector's attention was called on something really more important. It could be known he was concerned himself to see across the desk, his hands began to be by staring through the glass plate. Even a stranger would have noted the dash of excitement in the keen eyes beneath the shaggy, or grey, brows the tightening of the thin lips.

Through the window South Railway Street lay open to inspection from end to end and the movement of the Inspector's eyes showed that they followed someone moving along the street.

Suddenly he dropped back in the rickety swivel chair and a flame flew to a peak button beneath the desk.

Back in his office at the rear of the barracks Sergeant Mahon started in the hall over his door jangled. For a second

or two he watched the little clapper tremble, then, rising, he tugged his tunic down and passed out into the hall. A constable seated at a narrow desk there shook his head in answer to a dumb look of enquiry, and spread his hands.

The Sergeant knocked at a door on his left

"Come in! Come in."

In the tone was impatience and protest making it appear that the Sergeant was somehow at fault and Mahon entered and took his stand silently and stuffily inside.

Inspector Barker did not turn. His attention was fixed beyond the window. Impatiently he beckoned.

"Here Mahon quick!" He pointed.

Mahon hurried to the desk and stopped to follow the pointing finger.

Before the American Hotel, midway along South Railway Street two Indians lounged toward Toronto Street. Nothing more.

To one less familiar with local conditions it would have meant nothing. Indians were not uncommon in Medicine Hat. There was an encampment of Blackfeet in the ravines of the cutbank toward the east and they gathered on the station platform, within a stone's throw of the barracks, to meet every trans-continental train peddling polished pseudo-buffalo horns, beadwork baskets, and leather moccasins.

But on the whole they were wont to travel singly, or in broken file silent isolated. In pairs they were conspicuous.

Something wrong there, muttered the Inspector. He need not have spoken for already a tangle of excitement, matching his superior's, had struck through Sergeant Mahon's veins. They're nervous, the Inspector continued as if talking to himself. They're frightened, and they've come to town to make themselves look innocent and to stiffen their courage. That's the third pair I've seen in half an hour.

His hand flew out to point up Main Street, the street that stretched away from beside the barracks to the southern cutbank where the town ended. "There's a pair now. Him-m! Get out and see what's the matter. I haven't seen so many Indians on the street since Grey Coyote got into that mess with Blue Pete. Do a bit of ferreting. They'll talk to you, if to anyone. Hurry before that pair reach the corner."

Sergeant Mahon wheeled and turned to his office, and

in less than a minute he was out in the street. With the opening of the barracks door every evidence of haste vanished. Lounging out to Main Street he turned along it toward the railway tracks. At the end of the station platform he paused for a moment and glanced indifferently along it. Every movement fell into a pattern of one who was merely out to pass the time with no destination in mind.

The Indians had to be handled with care except in moments of emergency. Their action must be swift and ruthless. Always suspicious of the fairness of the law they were never at ease within sight of the Mounted Police uniform. There were a couple of reasons for that and the police knew it. There still lingered in the red man's mind a silent resentment against forces that had driven him from his own open spaces and had introduced new and unacceptable laws as fringing on ancient rights. Almost equally embarrassing was the sense of guilt in every Indian's mind for they knew themselves as potential law-breakers held to conformity only by fear and a remitting supervision.

In the market uniform reserved for town wear Sergeant Mahon was a fine figure of a man, a conspicuous one. Of medium height only, his straight back square, his lean waist, clear eye and supple graceful movements never failed to have their effect on law-breakers who might have defied a less impressive figure. The mere pose of him, confident without arrogance had saved him from many a fight that might have gone badly with him had pulled him through dangers that would otherwise have proved too much for him.

Of the Medicine Hat detachment he stood in best with the Indians. They had always found him fast of unrelenting and they had learned to trust him. They feared him even while they respected him.

At the corner of Main and South Railway Streets he appeared still undisturbed. The incoming Indians drew not so much as a glance. But the moment the barracks door opened they had seen him and their casual stroll altered a little bringing them closer together. Inspector Harter, watching every movement understood they had broken their silence.

They dare not turn back but their advance was slower, as if delaying with the hope that the Sergeant would turn along South Railway Street.

When however he continued up Main Street their agitation displayed itself in a reforming of the single file, their eyes turned downward they sidled to the inside of the sidewalk, clutching their blankets more tightly about them.

Mahon continued to show no sign that he was aware of them his attention directed, for the moment across the street to the entrance to the Royal Hotel stables. It was not until he was almost on them that he appeared to notice them. Then he stopped.

"Hello, Lone Wolf!"

The leading Indian raised his eyes, and a sad smile flitted over his coppery countenance, but he did not speak. He would have passed on had not Mahon stepped before him tapping his shoulder in a friendly way. The second Indian pulled up in line, and stood in silence. Mahon turned to him.

"What's on your mind, Big Otter?"

The question had no special significance. The Mounted Police had found it well to treat the Indians as children when there was no reason to be serious. The Indians liked it, it reassured them.

Lone Wolf granted. "Take a walk," he muttered. It was explanation not an order.

Mahon laughed. "All right. I understand." The laugh somehow added weight to it. "What have you to tell me?"

Lone Wolf squirmed, and looked anxiously about. Plainly he wished to speak, but feared to.

Mahon understood that too, and turned away. "All right. I'll meet you at the catbanks in an hour." Without waiting for a reply he continued up the street.

Back in the barracks Inspector Barker, reading every move, as he thought, turned. "Damn him! Doesn't he see they're pulling his leg? Doesn't he know the Indians well enough by this time for that? He was growing to himself. Now he's messed things up for good. They know we're suspicious and their lips are closed. If he doesn't see something serious has happened he ought to be a -a town policeman, not a Mounted. He squirmed angrily in his chair. "Now I'll have to get Blue Pete working on it--and that always means trouble. It's dangerous, he hates 'em like rattlers. Hain't any patience with 'em. and that's strange seeing he's got some of their blood in his own veins. Oh, well!"

He heaved a heavy sigh and dropped his eyes to the forms he had been brought by the Superintendent at Leith bridge when the Indians arrived. These forms, the red tape that had been recently introduced, were the bane of his existence, largely because there had been a time when he was pretty much his own boss in the district for hundreds of miles about Medicine Hat, when, as he still started, they had run more smoothly, even with no railway within half a thousand miles, and with only his own men to employ for the greater part of the year.

Sergeant Mahon considered this was entirely unrespecting to his superior's arrangements. Indeed, he was rather pleased at the ease with which he had effected the purpose for which he had been appointed. He felt certain that some Wolf or some one else would be the first to call meet him as ordered, with at least some part of the ones that he guided them. The Indians never openly defied Mounted Police orders, paying too much on their consciences to risk the resultant enquiries.

Striding into Fourth Avenue Mahon passed eastward to Toronto Street and turned down the hill to South Railway Street. On the way he passed two more pairs of Indians, but merely greeted them without stopping. He was conscious, however, of a queer excitement within him. More and more he was convinced that something serious had happened. Leaving the station platform he reached the tracks at the foot of Toronto Street. He noted that the Indians, always gathered there to meet the agent, due arrangements were being made, more than usual, and instead of standing about separately, as was customary, they were clustered together, as if for some sort of mutual support.

The train, now pulling down the western side, took a turn the river side as he reached South Railway Street. It blocked his way to the barracks. It held up him a pair of Indians, and he noticed that these did not even look at him, but edged to the middle of the road, until the way was clear.

Reaching the barracks he started off briskly toward his room, only to be stopped by the thundering voice of the Inspector.

"Damn you, Mahon! You've messed up the works now for sure. No wonder you want to sneak to your own room. Come in here!"

Mahon pushed the door open and entered.

The Inspector continued to growl. "I saw how they worked you for a sucker Mahon. Couldn't you see it? Don't you know the Indians well enough, by this time, to see through their little game? Disgust and anger almost choked him, and he struck the desk with clenched fist.

Mahon straight and stiff waited until the outburst was ended. "I'm to meet Lone Wolf in an hour near the encampment sir," he announced quietly.

The Inspector swung about to face him, manner and expression changed. "You are? Good. That's fine." He was as warm as frank in commendation as in condemnation. "Any idea what's up?"

"Not the slightest sir, but I imagine it's serious. They're badly worked up. Even the crowd at the station shows it."

The Inspector gazed for a few moments at the window. Then he grabbed at his watch. "An hour, you say? Man alive, almost half the time's gone now! What are you waiting for? Hurry or they'll change their minds. Once they do that we'll have to work everything out for ourselves. Ah—would you like me to go with you?"

"They're expecting me sir," replied the Sergeant. "It never seems as serious to talk to me."

It was diplomatic enough not to hurt, and the Inspector waved him away.

In his own office the Sergeant started to change to his brown field tunic, but on second thoughts retained the scarlet one—it was less businesslike and suggestive. It would appear to onlookers that he was merely out for a ride.

In five minutes he rode through the corral gate of the barracks. Constable Langley, youngest recruit and still enthusiastic, closed the gate regretfully behind him. "If it's murder or anything like that, Sergeant, work me in on it, will you?"

Mahon reined in and looked down gravely into the youthful face. "Some day, Langley, you'll be satisfied to take on only what's given you, and be grateful it isn't more. And, by the way, fooling about with the Indians is something different from mixing it with Montana rustlers. You'll learn that too."

He set off at a walking pace northward, away from the town.

CHAPTER II

SERGEANT MAHON ENQUIRES

JUPITER the big black Sergeant Mahon rode did not like it. Had he been turned through the town and away over the prairie toward the north, he would have fought for his head. In that direction lay the open prairie level as prairie go, but not so wide and open that hospitable ranch stations were not awaiting him, as well as hundreds of inferior (in stature) broncos before which he could parade his size even though parade had never interfered with a close friendship.

Northward, however, the way was blocked in half a mile by the sweep of the South Saskatchewan River, nothing in that direction but the tag ends of the town on the flats, where spring floods were wont to jay annual havoc. Beyond the river even had they been able to cross it was wider, more open space than southward, but unhabitated and desolate. Jupiter had been there, once or twice, and had known only trouble, exposure, loneliness, and little rest.¹

Mahon followed the street past the hospital to a point where it seemed almost to peter out, and turned eastward along the river's edge on a rough track whose use was largely confined to the annual cowboys' race, won one year by Blue Pete's famous little pinto Whiskers against the best Montana had to offer.²

The road ended at the baseball grounds. Beyond to the east was a rough, untracked, broken area that ended in the hills and gulches of the cutbank where the Blackfeet had their encampment.

Part of our ride lay by the bushes that grew along the river's edge. Mahon suggested Jupiter to a faster pace, and after a quarter of an hour reached the baseball grounds. Not far from the grounds a few scattered houses had been erected by a speculative builder, and Mahon noticed that from each, as he passed, emerged curious women and children. Not much traffic passed their way, and some of them called cheerily to him. He waved and passed on.

He had no wish to attract attention. His meeting with the Indians must be in private, for several reasons. Only

¹ *The Tenderfoot.*

² *The Fragrance of Blue Pete.*

if they were alone would the Indians talk, and the townspeople must be given no ground for speculation. Had he turned these thoughts toward the arrangement a host of shady views might have been on his lips. The K. C. agent had earned the reputation of the town as a liar, but rumors always surpassed the truth, and the Mounted Police had heard it was easier to get along with the Indians if the townspeople evinced no interest in them.

To Mahon's annoyance he saw that he must take the long way round. It might run a hour late, but the only thing to do was to ride on up the hill to the south-east of the town, and come back over the open prairie by way of Dunmore Junction. He knew the Indians were already aware of his approach, that they would have watchers knowing his every move, and they would understand what he had in mind.

Crossing the railway tracks he turned the hill and out of sight of the town, but in the depression turned sharply toward Dunmore Junction, where a branch railway, the Crows Nest, struck off toward Left ridge and New.

He did not delay. At the best place he could sit he without attracting too much attention from any chance observer, he rode along to a point where the railway dropped in a winding curve down the hillside toward the town. Several hundred yards away was the Junction station, but only a handful of men worked there, and none would be free to follow him.

From that point the railways appeared as a jagged projection of heights intruding on the valley. Some were too steep to climb, at least were the dry woods. The railway had found a route, but there was the necessity of a road so that he decided to use the railway itself. He had done that before, and Jupiter knew how to handle the descent over the ties. There were to be sure several more obscure exits in the depression, and most of them were known to him, but he did not get with the Indians to know he knew them.

Jupiter picked his way downward, stepping gingerly from tie to tie, intent on every move, waiting a little in protest. Mahon paid no attention, indeed he seemed half asleep. But he knew that Indian eyes were fixed on his every move.

Half way down, a finger of hill stopped short, and after a glance about him he left the railway track and turned to a gentle slope, keeping to his right as much as the hills per-

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And when I saw what stood before him, I was awed by the hard
rims of his eyes and nose. He searched the Sergeant through
the act, as if he was prepared for a strike, where the Indians
were silent and turned as if driven away and unexpectedly
the man who had been away and I saw. Some yards
away and a man with a rifle in his hand.

I was the first woman Master at the mill stand and after a while I put together a basket of mixed laughter to say that it did not seem as if on a few weeks the stand staffs would be made of boys. I am sure the boys were slightly better than the girls, but I am not sure.

[illegible]

Taking his state, it is a before [quote] the who should know. As yet no one had uttered a word. Sergeant Mathew remained, alone, with fingers, or dismounted. The time to look at each other lay, however.

He wanted to hand me a sample. I said to meet you again.

He told me that he was a

The small, mutated Plandi, though, had not gone as he expected, and he used them to accept the proffered hand in a grip, not to reveal something of his strength, and the desire to exhibit it.

His White Shasta welcomes the Monks. He greeted

Mahon broke through threatened preliminaries. "You have something to tell me?"

He Who Shoots waved a hand behind him without turning, and his followers vanished almost as abruptly as they had appeared. The Indian pointed to the slope beside them.

"He Who Shoots has much to tell," he said. "We will sit down. The Blackfeet are in trouble."

"Yes, the Inspector knew that," Mahon seated himself hazy. The chief squatted cross-legged beside him.

"There is death among us, Sergeant."

"You mean murder, of course."

He Who Shoots nodded.

CHAPTER III

"IT'S MURDER"

IT was early evening when Sergeant Mahon rode into the barracks yard. Inspector Barker had not yet left for supper, for hours he had fumed and fretted, and as the afternoon advanced he had called in Corporal Jenkinson and given orders to ride straight to the Indian encampment to see what had happened, only to countermand the order before the corporal reached the door. He had confidence in Mahon and to send another officer after him would exhibit a fear it was unwise to display before the Indians.

He heard the back door open, and the brisk step of the Sergeant, and he hurried to his own door and threw it open.

A glance at Mahon's face told him that he bore grave news, and an involuntary sigh broke from him. The Indians were always a problem, requiring a patience and forbearance he was ill-fitted to use. When involved in crime they gave the Mounted Police their most difficult and dangerous work. Their cunning, their stubbornness even in face of threat, their clannishness, their natural cruelty and rascality, made it particularly difficult to treat them with the strict formality and tardiness of the law. Except for Sergeant Mahon he had not a man in the detachment to whom he could entrust such affairs.

The Sergeant followed him into his office, and closed the door. The Inspector dropped wearily into the rickety swivel

chair, legs spread wide, nervously twisting the ends of his moustache.

"Well, I can tell by your face, Mahon, there's hell to pay." He pointed to the one empty chair.

Mahon seated himself. "It's murder," he said.

The Inspector's teeth bared. "If they'd murder one another off and be done with it life would be worth living here. Well, go on, go on. Who's murdered?"

"It's Bear Head, sir."

Inspector Barker nodded thoughtfully. "And I'll wager he deserved it. It's good riddance, and—" He unbuttoned his throat lacy and tightened the collar of his tunic about his neck. "Who did it?"

"North Wind, they say. That's what He Who Shouts says."

The Inspector whistled through his teeth. "Do you believe him?"

"Absolutely—though I don't know North Wind personally."

"North Wind. We-ell! I think I know him. He's one of the last I'd expect to murder without cause . . . and with Bear Head the victim. Not that North Wind wouldn't use a gun with any sort of excuse, but he's had a good reputation—and he's got a squaw with a good record, hasn't he? But you don't know him. You say the chief told you this. Then he must have come out of his shell to tell us anything. Scared I suppose."

"They're certainly uncomfortable about it, sir," said Mahon. He was silent for a few moments, his forehead wrinkled.

The Inspector noticed it. "You've something more to tell. Go on, man, go on."

"Yes, they're frightened, and I've an idea it's from something more than the mere fact of the murder. It looks to me like a guilty conscience though I find it hard to figure why. I believe He Who Shouts when he says the murder was committed by North Wind, but there's more than that."

"Connivance?" suggested the Inspector.

"Some sort of connivance, though I can't imagine what. He answered all my questions, but . . ."

"Where's North Wind?"

"That's what I was coming to, sir. When I asked that question I sensed something wrong. North Wind is gone,

of course, they pretend not to know where. I'm not sure they would tell us if they knew."

"Could we use pressure to make them speak?" Before Mahon could reply the Inspector answered himself: "But no, if they won't speak nothing will make them. It means we have to take up a case without any direction clues, I suppose. And it won't be an easy one."

The Sergeant agreed with a nod. "It will be dangerous, too, sir. From what I gathered North Wind is a fighter. They tell me he's their best shot, that he wins all their rifle contests without trouble."

"Did they give you no cause for the killing?"

"No, sir. They don't know what would appear to us as a good cause, and they won't take a chance. We've drilled them into the belief that we think killing is always murder—when anyone does it but ourselves."

The Inspector frowned and jabbed at the blotter with a brass paperknife. "Some damned Indian foolishness. I'll warrant some of their silly laws broken. How was Bear Head murdered?"

"He was shot."

"You saw the body?"

"Yes, sir. They had sense enough to keep it for us to see. I insisted on not only seeing the body, but also the spot where the shot was fired. It was out on the prairie in a coulee south of Danmore Junction, where there are a lot of bulberry bushes. That pretty well covers all I learned."

The Inspector thought it over. "And North Wind has disappeared. He threw out his hands. You see what it means? We've got half a continent to search."

"He took Wild Flower with him."

"Who's Wild Flower?"

"The squaw you mentioned, sir. That's what helps to convince me that the other Indians must know where he went. The pair could not have fled after the murder without collecting something for the flight, and the whole camp knows of the murder. Plains folk are prepared to do everything they can to protect North Wind. It may be only because Bear Head was something of a bully, but I imagine they justify the murder in their own minds."

The Inspector glowered at the floor for a full two minutes in silence. Suddenly he looked up. "Not an idea where he went, eh?"

The Sergeant shook his head. "Every time I came around to asking, He Who Shouts clamped his lips together."

"Hm-m. He'd have among his own race somewhere, of course but that helps little. There are a dozen reserves. But no, he wouldn't dare go where the Indian agents would make enquiries about strangers. No, he and his squaw would be sure to make for one of the scores of Indian encampments farther west-out in the foothills."

"Unless they hide in the Cypress Hills, sir," suggested Mahon. "They would keep in touch with their friends there."

The Inspector's eyes flashed. That would be too easy. Blue Pete would rout them out in no time. They couldn't hide themselves in the Hills where he wouldn't find them.

"If he would undertake the job, sir," the Sergeant put in.

"Why wouldn't he? He hates Indians."

"Hates them enough not to wish to become involved with them unless he has to," qualified Mahon. "We might get them ourselves in the Hills. But if they've gone to the foothills . . ."

If they have I suppose I'll have to hand the chase over to Macleod or Cagary, and you know what that would mean. I've learned that when I want work done I must do it myself. Besides, North Wind would be no more than a name to them, and they're not interested, as we are. Did you talk to other Indians?"

"As much as I could. But they refused to talk plainly. It had been arranged that He Who Shouts should do all the talking."

Lie [Inspector considered.] "Do you think we might wheedle anything out of Lone Wolf or Big Otter if we got them here . . . or even from the chief himself?"

The reply was a smile. It was enough, and the Inspector swore.

"I've got to be two men in this district, one with the Indians the other with the whites. The double rôle gets tiresome. Have you any suggestions?"

Sergeant Mahon stared thoughtfully through the window. "I would suggest, sir, that we make a search near home-in the Hills."

"There's nowhere else anyone could hide near here. But the Indians know the Hills as none of us do. I'd have to use Blue Pete . . . and I'm reluctant to set him to work

again until he's forgotten the months he's just spent in the Badlands.¹ There's a bit of guilty conscience there yet, and I'd like to give him time to get over it. Besides, the Indians would have no compunction about shooting him at sight, for they hate him as much as he does them. It would be like waving a red flag before an angry bull. There'd probably be a few more murders for us to punish—and Blue Pete might be one of the victims. . . . No, we'll undertake that hunt ourselves."

He slouched over the desk, thinking heavily. Suddenly he said:

"Tomorrow you start. If you need help take one of the boys with you. But you'll have to go carefully. The gentlest-seeming Indian is a potential gunman when cornered—and they often feel cornered when they're not. North Wind wouldn't hesitate to shoot if it offered a chance to escape." He frowned into Mahon's face. "I'm giving you all the devilish jobs, Mahon, but . . ." He cleared his throat. "That's all. Don't come back without something to tell me."

CHAPTER IV

IN THE CYPRESS HILLS

SERGEANT MAHON drew in his mount and sat looking about. The shadows lay deep among the trees; the tiny bright patches, where the sun managed to penetrate the thick foliage, only adding to the gloom and impenetrability of the forest. It was a breathless day, and there, in the forest, he felt as if he would suffocate, as if the great trees bent sneeringly down to him, daring him to go on, reaching out their long branches to grasp and smother him.

It was the heart of the Cypress Hills—that curious patch of wooded heights and hollows that stretches for a hundred miles in a ten mile strip along the southern edge of Alberta into Saskatchewan. Elsewhere, for hundreds of miles, the Canadian West was bare prairie.

Two weeks had passed since Inspector Barker had sent him into the Hills to search for a murderer, two weeks of ceaseless riding. Day and night he had wandered through

¹ *Blue Pete Outings*.

the same day and night he had hoped gritting his teeth against a conviction that the time was wasted. On the Medicine Hat settlement he knew the H's best knew them better than any one but the Indians and Blue Pete but he had accomplished nothing. He knew better than anyone that failure is bad as much as a clear road a little since the H's might shelter an army without leaving a trace.

Until yesterday he had not been alone. Corporal Jenkinson and Langley had been with him, the former an old campaigner with little hope of success from the first, the latter always filled with the enthusiasm of youth and desperation. Yet it was on Langley that Mahon had counted most for he was never discouraged and he had done much wandering in the H's during the months when Blue Pete had disappeared.¹

They had found nothing, nothing to give them hope. There was no sign that any one had been in the H's within months. Traces had been washed with nights thickets had been peeled and the many feeling grounds about the streams that crossed the ravines had told nothing. Save for the wild life the H's were deserted.

Jenkinson and Langley had gone. Langley first to telephone the Inspector from the Eagle Butte Mounted Police bar. And the Inspector angry and disappointed had ordered them back to the barracks.

Sergeant Mahon had dared to disobey. During the last few days he had had a strange feeling as he rode. He would find himself staring through the trees as if expecting someone yet he heard no sound. He did not see alone. At first he ascribed it vaguely to the proximity the trees had a quiver, for the great silence, the absence of life and the vigorous growth everywhere had commenced to work on his imagination. Hundreds of animal eyes he knew were always on him yet the sight of so much as a bird was unusual. Timber wolves, too were everywhere yet he had never seen one in the H's though often at night their howling went chill down his spine.

It was the feeling of being followed, of being watched, that decided him to delay obeying the Inspector's order to return. There was something yet to be explained.

All today he had ridden alone and more and more he was convinced that someone was about keeping out of sight,

¹ *Blue Pete Outlaw*

but keeping him in sight. But now with evening coming on he decided to give up and leave him alone. He was worried too at his failure to find a clue to North Wind's whereabouts. The prospect was a dark one. To say about it would be pleasant to hear. Everything in the Hills appeared to peer at him, the trees, the shadows, the hills, the rippling streams. Their voices joined to foster his regret.

The shadows deepened. He walked at his watch. Almost seven o'clock. And it was a good hour's ride to the pasture. By that time the trees would be dark and Jupiter would have to pick the way out. On the night of the fourth of September, the night he left the West was the giving place tonight. But darkness and a grain of moisture tonight he would find his way down into the hills. He suggested the night as a matter of course and time and for the first time for a fortnight. Tomorrow was something to Virginia Hat.

He set off northward. He felt the trees. They seemed shut through him. He was a little way out and not far but with the thought that a surprise awaited. There was nothing he could do about it but wait now and then, nothing but wait to listen. Jupiter too was uneasy. His master was never at ease except on the farm with his clucking hens and wide nostrils and audible breathing and sidelong glances meant little.

Darkness enveloped him sooner than he knew so that where he sat now at the edge of the trees it was dark even dark out in the pasture. For a long time he sat listening intently, wondering, a long thin will tapers for imagining things. Several times he almost turned his head to look behind. It reminded him of his childhood days on a lonely road at night and he was a little afraid.

A shadow moved before him and stopped.

"Yuh, hoo, master, yet here am I," he began, asked a voice he recognized with a third of fear.

He laughed. "Ha. That explains everything. You've been following me about for days, Pete. Why the devil did you do that?"

"I followed yuh for a week," said the half-breed. "I rode round yuh all that waste time. North Wind ain't here, he never was."

"What do you know about North Wind? And how do you know I've been looking for him?"

Blue Pete chuckled. "I knowed. That ain't him no Naches

here for weeks. I keep 'em party wel. skeered off. This is whar I hang out most o' the time, an' they jes' natchully don' like runnin' up ag'in me when thar ain't no Mounties to keep us friendly."

"How did you know I was looking for North Wind?" Mahon repeated.

"Yuh gotta find a murderer, an'cha?"

"Did you know about the murder?"

"I git about some," replied the half breed.

"How long since you were in Medicine Hat?"

"Matter of a couple weeks, I reckon. I seen yuh ride off here to look for the Neche. Wot'ho need to keer? A Neche less is that much less trouble for the Mounties."

Mahon shrugged. "Perhaps you're right there. But, as you say, it's a murderer, and that's all that matters."

"He ain't in the Hills, never has bin."

"You give me your word for that?"

Blue Pete grunted. "Ever know me to perreck a Neche, Sergeant?"

"No-o!"

"I'd find him fer yuh ef he was here."

Mahon's mind worked quickly. "If you know about the murder, perhaps you know the cause of it--what the trouble was."

"I didn' keer none. One less Neche, that's all that mattered to me. Ef it wass t I'd help yuh find him."

"I wish to Heaven you would, Pete," declared the Sergeant fervently.

Blue Pete was silent for a few moments. "I am' takin' on no more jobs, not jes' now. I . . ."

"Not as a special favour to me, Pete?" Inspector Barker has given the job to me, and I've done nothing so far. Now I must return and be stormed at for failing. If you could do this for me . . ."

"Yuh wudn't tell th' Inspector?" The half-breed's voice was low and excited.

"I could scarcely lend myself to that, Pete. The Inspector would be as grateful as I'd be."

"Shure. An' he'd gimme the job. I might help yuh, but I do want no job jes' now. I bin 'way all summer, an' the 3-Bar-Y needs me."

"It never needs you, Pete," protested the Sergeant in a hurt voice.

"I ain't goin' to," repeated the half-breed stubbornly. "I jes' natchully reach fer mah 45 wen I smell a Nettle. No, su, I ain' gittin' into no more trouble this year. I got skeered 'nuff over knockin' that skunk, Bill Scarway, off." Jes' stopped yuh to tel. yuh to save yer time lookin' fer North Wind here in the Hills. S long."

The shadow at the edge of the trees vanished. There was scarcely a sound to mark its progress. Mahon called the half-breed's name twice but there was no reply. Gloomily he turned to the open prairie.

CHAPTER V

BLUE PETE STARTS TO WORK

LATE the following evening Sergeant Mahon rode into the barracks yard and wearily dismounted. Langley took Jupiter and jerked a thumb toward the building.

"Go in and take some of it yourself, Sergeant, if you have any consideration for the rest of us."

Inside Priest, seated before the desk in the hall, beckoned to him. "The Inspector wants to see you the moment you return," he whispered. "And I don't tell you. Jenkinson and Langley came in yesterday. Jenkinson's gone off already to see what can be done out from Marled. Some body's going to have to search the Indian camps down there. I'm glad it's not me."

Mahon stalked wearily into his own office, changed his tunic, combed his hair, and with a sigh of resignation went forward to get it over in the Inspector's office.

Fifteen minutes later he emerged from the interview, in a white heat, grabbed his Stetson and stamped out into the street. He was convinced that in another three minutes he would have handed in his resignation—until he remembered that he had felt the same way a hundred times before. Wrapped in his anger and resentment—and in the thought that perhaps the Inspector was not so far wrong—he walked slowly up Main Street. As he passed the opening to the Royal Hotel stables he had a misty impression of someone dismounting there in the dim light. So unimportant was it that he did not even look.

At the corner of Fourth Avenue he awakened to a feeling that he had been followed more than half-way up the block. He did not look back, but continued to the corner. His first thought was to turn along Fourth Avenue, it would give him a chance to look behind without appearing suspicious. On second thoughts however he continued along Main Street.

As he passed the Men's Club, on the corner across Fourth Avenue, a great slouching figure lounged past.

There was no mistaking that shape, that powerful, muscular walk, even in the dim light.

"Hello, Pete," he called in a low voice.

The half breed did not stop. But back to the Sergeant drifted a few words. "Meet yuh up next corner. Darker thar."

The natural gas street light that usually shone on the next corner happened to be out. There Blue Pete awaited him.

"Thar's eyes everywhere, Sergeant," he declared. "They'd think a lot o' rasty things ef they seen us talkin'. I seen yuh lookin' purty blue. Wot's the matter?"

They crowded into the fence about a dark house.

"Oh. I've been getting the usual raking over for failing to do what I was sent to do. I didn't think my feelings showed so plainly."

Blue Pete chuckled. "W'en yuh didn' even look whar I was desmountin in the hotel yard I knowed suthun' was wrong. Mostly yuh do' mass nothin'. Gittin' the Inspector in yer hair, eh?"

"Yes, damn you, and you can take a lot of the blame, Pete," growled Mahon. "Some day I'm going to break loose and bate myself. The way I feel I'd give myself hydrophobia. I

"Me to blame?" The half-breed's eyes were big with shock. "I ain't done nothin' sence I come back from the Badlands. I bin in town oncet, an' I ain't bin talkin' to nobody 'ceptin' Mura an' the boys—an' to you in the Halls yestiddy. Thar ain't nothin' yuh kin blame on me, Sergeant."

Mahon made an angry sound. "You know what's the matter. I've found out nothing about North Wind. I haven't the faintest idea where he is."

"But whar d'I come in?"

"You're the only one can get me out of the mess. You're the only one can find where North Wind has gone."

Blue Pete shuffled nervously and ran a huge hand over his lips. "That ain't nothin'," he began.

"You can find out if you want to," persisted the Sergeant. "If I don't know soon there'll be the devil to pay. The Inspector is in a vile mood about it. It's two weeks since the murder, and we're as much in the dark as ever."

"Wot cud I do?"

"You can find where he went."

Blue Pete did not deny it. He hesitated. "Wud that git yuh onto the mess?"

"It would help. When we find where he is we can get hold of him."

The half-breed shook his head doubtfully. "Mebbe 'tain't so easy. Th' Inspector says I allus git yuh into a mess—an' muhself too. I shure ain't got no patience with them Neches. I'd shure git into trouble."

"You've handled them before," pleaded Mahon hopefully. "This time I'm asking you to do it for me."

Blue Pete squirmed uncomfortably. "Wish yuh wudn' put it that way, Sergeant. Them Neches do like me no better'n I do them. They ain' got over Grey Coyote's an' a few more times I run up agin' 'em. I'm jes' p'ison to 'em."

Though he felt mean about it, the Sergeant persisted. "I hate to ask it, Pete, but the Inspector has put it up to me. And what more can I do? I could hang around the Blackfeet for the next ten years and learn nothing more than I know now. You've got ways of . . ."

"Th' Inspector do' like my ways none, an' I ain' got no others. None that's any good, leastwise."

"But it's the sort of thing you like, Pete. You like getting one on the Indians."

Perhaps it was the picture of "getting one on the Indians" that turned the scales. Blue Pete shook his head gravely. "Reckon yuh're takin' a darn big chance, Sergeant."

Mahon had difficulty in restraining a smile. Working among the Indians would be Blue Pete's chance, not his. "I'm not asking you to do anything illegal, not suggesting it, but I'm helpless, and I'm turning to the one friend who can help me."

There was silence for a few minutes. Mahon waited.

"Gimme four-five days," said the half-breed. Turning

Blue Pete, Rebel.

abruptly away, he disappeared into the darkness of Fifth Avenue.

The telephone on the desk before Inspector Barker ticked, and he picked it up impatiently.

Hello, hello? Inspector Barker speaking. What's that? Right out of your stable last night, you say? Here right under our noses. Good Lord, man. What next? Come right down here and tell me all about it.

Twenty minutes later an excited man pushed open the barn door, walked to a post-seated at the hall desk, and tapped briskly on the Inspector's door. In the next few minutes Priest found various excuses for passing and reopening the door, but he heard only the muffled phrases with new and then a stop; but gradually an explanation from the Inspector. Then the man emerged, wiping his forehead.

Sergeant Mahony fell gasped angrily, and he hurried to the Inspector's office. The Inspector sat with an incredulous, indignant expression on his lean face.

My God, what next! he exploded, spreading his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"Yes, sir?"

They're rustling horses from right under our noses now, right here in town. Larry Heath has just told me someone stole his horse from the stable last night.

A brief warning rang in the Sergeant's head, but he failed to understand its meaning. That's got his of his, you mean?

Has he ever had another horse, countered the Inspector.

It was there at seven last night when he told it. This morning it's gone, and the stable with it. And not one of the family heard a sound. Another mystery to pass on the burden of them that I'm in with, stuck up against. It's getting on my nerves, Mahony. I can't be following up this Indian murder, that's got us all at sea, and now rustling right in town—and I have to put someone in an unknown horse that who hasn't left a clue. Run up to Heath's place and take a look at things. He wants there isn't a mark that could be taken as a clue. The horse's head marks are there in the case—he hasn't had the horse out of the stable himself for more than a week, but that tells nothing. See if you can't dog something up. The brute couldn't fly away.

CHAPTER VI

KIDNAPPING

THE morning had continued to ring in the Sergeant's ears, and it worried him, for he knew it had nothing to do with the momentary flaring of excitement during those twelve weeks the year. It was not wrong to have to the pride of the Mounties. But, though there was no reason for it, since it was within the time when he, in the harness of the mounted police, was mounted. Hunting of crime was somewhat different. It was something a large crime, and even the time it seemed to be the responsibility of the Mounties. But a Major knew for certain that it would be left to him, perhaps, with the explanation that the matter must be handled at home.

A visit to Hattie's shop, and a careful examination, told Major Little not exactly what he had been told by the owner. The reason for which the shop had been there was, however, enough. All he had to do was to get off the street and the shop inside the shop, and get in a new one. He had to lead the horse out. The tracks of the horse were there, following the direction of that taken after leaving the station. But all that was of no help, it merely suggested that that was not foolish enough to take toward a man, where he might be seen.

With nothing to report, Major returned to the barracks. There he found a new, unexpected surprise, and was forced to make another explanation.

It was not so difficult to stand up against it this time because his mind was an angry, angry thought. Was it possible that the man of the house was associated with the other men in the last quarters of West Main? In spite of himself, the query kept going forward, asking reason.

Challenging was something he did not believe. He could not doubt but he was going to know that the whole relationship of the two men was correct, that the former occupied while the latter was not, and was not.

A strange depression had set in. Twice during the day he went out on the street in search of some sort of surprise, or surprise. And as he wandered about he found himself looking for Blue Pete. Hunting was directly in the hall, and a line it was against runners that the Inspector

had used Blue Pete most frequently. No one else could follow a trail so surely and successfully, no one else understood brands and the ways of rustlers so well. As for that, why shouldn't the half-breed understand their ways when for years he was one of them?

But even as he let his eyes open for his half-breed friend, Mahon was reluctant to face the ordeal an interview would be. It was not that he had any thought of repeating his appeal for assistance. Equally obvious he longed for even as he shied away from it. Inspector Barker, he told himself, was the one to call, the half-breed to the assistance of the Mounted Police.

The following morning he was called to the Inspector's office, and the whole affair of the stealing of the horse was reviewed; every slant and possibility was examined. Every one of which they could think. Obviously it was not the work of local rustlers. Equally obviously professional rustlers were not concerned in such a trifling affair when whole herds of bronchos roamed the prairie.

Mahon listened with his mind wandering off on slants of its own. He was brought back to attention by a remark of the Inspector's.

You know, Mahon, I've a hunch it's mixed up somehow with that murder. He saw the flicker of interest in the Sergeant's eyes. Ah! So you've had the same thought. Is it possible that North Wolf has been in hiding somewhere here all the time, perhaps warned by the other Blackfeet, and when the hue and cry died down a little he dared to help himself to the finest broncho in town to make his getaway?

Mahon nodded. It's been on my mind, sir, but it sounded rather fantastic. It doesn't seem reasonable either that he'd risk remaining as long as long, or that the other Blackfeet would dare help him in hiding him.

'It might have been one way of throwing us off the scent,' suggested the Inspector.

It would strike them as too dangerous, sir, I believe. Besides, his square has gone with him. It would be hard to conceal them both, and I can't believe his friends would risk it. I don't think they'll help us to find him; they appear to be backing him as far as they dare, but they wouldn't involve themselves in the murder in that way.

The Inspector considered it. Perhaps you're right. Just the same I've a funny feeling

His head jerked forward toward the window. A shadow had passed close beyond the glass.

"Wasn't that an Indian?"

Mahon too had seen it. He had risen and was leaning over the desk. He turned toward the door as the sound of the outer door opening reached them.

"An Indian all right, sir," he murmured.

A knock sounded on the door.

The Inspector shouted: "Come in."

Constable Frost entered, closed the door behind him, and stood stiffly to attention. An Indian asking to see you, sir. Says he must see you right away. It's One Far.

"Did he tell you what he wanted?" inquired the Inspector.

"No, sir. He keeps demanding to see you, and he's in a hurry."

"Send him in."

The Indian, a big hulking figure clutching a new blanket tightly about him, the attire the Indians assumed for business purposes in their dealings with the tourists on the trans-continental trains, slid through the door and stood with downcast eyes.

The Inspector rose and addressed him cheerily.

"Come and sit down, One Far. Glad to see any of you any time. Which was not quite the truth."

Mahon knew One Far fairly well, and the Inspector knew enough about him to recall his position in the tribe living in the nearby encampment. He had a better command of English than his fellows, or it appeared that way, which amounted to the same thing when outsiders were about. It was an Indian habit to conceal their mastery of the English language, partly to save themselves embarrassing questions, partly to enable them to pick up useful information from unsuspecting passengers. One Far had lived for some years in Edmonton and had been in constant association with whites.

He seated himself gingerly on the edge of the chair, crouched forward, his eyes still on the floor. The Inspector saw how uneasy he was, and started to talk.

"I hope you've come to tell us something more about the murder of Bear Head."

One Far's face lifted abruptly, and he looked the Inspector straight in the eyes. "Last night Little Pine was carried away," he grunted.

Inspector Barker frowned. "What do you mean? Who, or what, is Little Pine and what do you mean by 'carried away'? Do you mean someone's been kidnapped?"

One Ear nodded. "Little Pine belong Flying Eagle. Little girl."

The Indian, nervous, had fallen into the Indian manner of speaking English, though he could speak it well.

"You're telling me someone has stolen her from the camp?"

A nod was sufficient reply.

"How old is Little Pine?"

"Six winters have passed since . . ."

"Six years old, eh? That ought to suspicious things.

But at that age she may have wandered away and lost herself. How can you . . ."

"Joe Blue Goose gone too."

"You mean you think Joe Blue Goose took her?"

"Little Pine gone. Joe Blue Goose gone," said the Indian.

"When did this happen?"

"Last night—just dark time."

"If you know the time so well someone must have seen her taken."

One Ear nodded.

"Then you know it was Joe Blue Goose?" declared the Inspector impatiently.

"No sure. Big Indian ride from dark, and pick little girl up and ride away up railway."

"Didn't you get after him?" The Inspector turned irritably to Mahon. "They'd use their guns quickly enough for less reason. He turned back to One Ear. "Did you chase after him?"

"Ponies far away, in Spirit Tree Ravine."

Inspector Barker frowned at the blotter on his desk. "Do you know any reason why Joe Blue Goose should want to kidnap Little Pine?"

One Ear's head shook vigorously.

"I understand you've had a lot of trouble at the camp since Red Elk died. Has that anything to do with it?"

The Indian shrugged, and spread his hands, then frantically he clutched his blanket more tightly about him—as if a relapse into the white man's gestures had betrayed something. "No sure Joe Blue Goose. Too dark."

"Did he take his pony?"

"Sure pony gone. Not him took Little Pine. Big bronc—ride like devil. Joe Blue Goose not ride like that. Joe Blue Goose not strong enough to pack Little Pine up on the run and not hurt her."

"Hm-m. But there must be some connection," murmured the Inspector. He turned to the Sergeant. "Get out to the encampment with One Ear. Surely you can pick up something this time. It looks as if they're more willing to talk. Make enquiries about the relationship between Flying Eagle and Joe Blue Goose. May be a feud of some kind."

One Ear shifted uneasily. "No more to tell. I tell everything. I bring everything." He gripped the blanket more tightly. "He Who Shouts send me to tell it all."

"You'll go with him, Sergeant," insisted the Inspector firmly. He faced One Ear. "We make our own investigations—and you'd better open up and talk. That's all." He waved them from the room.

CHAPTER VII

A HALF-BREED ACTS

IN the darkness Blue Pete turned away from his Mounted Police friend and vanished. Along Fifth Avenue he kept to the deeper shadows. He was thinking heavily. He was unhappy. Sergeant Mahon had piled on his shoulders a responsibility he was reluctant to assume, one that he hated to assume.

He disliked any task that forced him into contact with the Indians—the Nechee, as he unsaturnally termed them. It was not that he feared them, but that he feared that his hatred of them would get him into trouble. Without the Mounted Police, and their regulations to observe, he would have liked nothing better than to undertake a task that would furnish an opportunity to outwit the Nechee. Their nature, cruelty, their deceitfulness, their ruthlessness and shocking ways, angered him sometimes beyond control. In dealing with them his inclination was to be as ruthless as they, and that would hurt the Sergeant.

Now he faced the thing he hated most, and there was no escape. Between him and Mahon had grown up a friendship

such as he had never enjoyed with another. The years they had worked together had shown him that the Sergeant was a man he trusted, a man as fearless and determined as himself, and no less resourceful. They had worked together on so many difficult and dangerous cases, and had learned to like each other. For the Sergeant Blue Pete would have gone through fire and water without hesitation, many a time they had faced together what looked like certain death.

So that when Mahon threw himself on his friend's mercy there was no escape.

That he would be able to find some way to do what was asked of him the half-breed did not doubt. Accordingly, to refuse to do it was tantamount to repudiation of their friendship, a betrayal of the best friend he had ever had. That he could not face

As he ploughed along he thought it over, not whether he would undertake the task, but how to set about it. That North Wind was not hiding in the Cypress Hills he knew, as he knew that he had never been there since the murder. Little could happen in that shadowed region without his knowing it.

He decided that the Indian would take refuge in one of the Indian encampments scattered through the foothills of the Rockies; the west. But that helped little, since there were scores of such camps, the high thousands of square miles of foothills. It would take a year to visit them all. The fleeing Indian was a Blackfoot, and the tribes in the foothills were Chees and Piegans and Bloods and Saraks and many, with few Blackfeet. Originally bitter enemies, that condition no longer existed. An Indian of one tribe would do his best to help a member of another tribe against the whites, especially against the Mounted Police.

His mind wandered off to his own experience among the foothill Indians. Another visit to the encampments west of Maxson would have a warm welcome, but not of a nature to assist him in the task Mahon wished him to undertake. One visit had ended in full flight before a pursuing band that shot to kill. He could have picked them off one by one, but he had succeeded in the task Inspector Barker had given him, and that was all that mattered.

He remembered, then, that the Sergeant had asked only that he discover where North Wind had gone. After that the

Blue Pete, Rebel, Blue Pete Pays a Debt

reference was that the Mounted Police would take the boat up themselves. The thought brought a sigh of relief.

The things were he turned out. The boat went and landed on the upper level above the river. As he went the heavy current and at last he drew up on the open ground finding a slight depression that protected him from the wind. He lay down.

It was a long night with no sleep. Not far away to the west the South Saskatchewan River rushed tumultuously between high banks, the rapids plunging to foam above the wheel of the mill through the long narrow gorge. His thinking lay back on the river, on the fact he had not asked against why the small dam he supplied the lower water power. None but that he wanted to be near the mill dam.

He turned around on his elbow and looked back over the river. A dark line of light was seen glowing through the darkness and the river of stars again indicated the journal design on which the river was painted. A passenger came from the boat starting up to see the light with a lantern. Nothing, a passenger again looking at the light and the river at the top of the mill dam. The light looking the light on the river. A few moments later the river of stars again made a look on the river. The night the glow of the lamp of the river at the mill dam.

A few days later Pike left the river. He found the river light and the river of stars on the river. The passenger again looked up the river. The light with a lantern and the river of stars on the river.

He found the river of stars on the river. The light with a lantern and the river of stars on the river. The passenger again looked up the river. The light with a lantern and the river of stars on the river.

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The back door of the hotel was open and he let himself in

crept forward along a dimly lighted hall to the lobby and took a key from a hook behind the counter. A man sleeping in a chair beneath the hook did not awaken.

Returning to the yard he made for the stable door, unlocked it with the key, and let himself in.

"Hello, ole gal," he whispered into the darkness.

A low, glad whinny was the reply, and he poked his way along the wall to the rustling of uneasy hoofs. The whinny, repeated again and again, directed him to a stall near the far end, where his hand ran affectionately over a small broncho that nuzzled at his shoulder and touched his ear.

"Listen, Whiskers," he whispered, "I gotta leave yuh for a while. Dey'll look after yuh here. Ef they don't I'll look after them. I got aithin nasty to do an' yuh can't be in it this time, ole gal."

The answering whinny expressed understanding and disappointment, and Blue Pete chuckled.

"Yep, I know, tain't nice fer neither of us, but ef they got thur eyes on yuh, they'd know I done it an' that ud put me in the crog fer a long time. The Mounties won't like the way I'm goin' to do wot they ast me t' do an' that ain't no other way I kin see, so they musent know. 'Long, ole gal."

He fumbled at the pinto's lips, slapped her rump, and crept back out of the stable. In the hotel lobby he awakened the sleeping man, who jerked to his feet, hands raised.

Blue Pete laughed. "I ain't in no shootin' mood jes' now, Johnny. Keep 'em down."

The old man laughed. "That you, Pete?"

"Shure is."

"Want the pinto? The key." He saw the empty hook, and his lips fell apart. "Holy mackerel!"

Blue Pete hung the key back. "I bus out to Whiskers. Yuh was dreamin', yuh was back a top-hand ag'in' Johnny. I wudn' a waked yuh fer anythin'. I'm pullin' much freight fer a few days an' leavin' the pinto. Goin' off down Lethbridge way, on the midnight. Take good keer o' the ole gal or I'll be talkin' to yuh wen I get back."

"Sure, Pete, sure! I'll treat her like she was my own—when I had one."

The half-breed pulled a bill from his pocket and thrust it into Johnny's hand. "Along!"

He went out the back way, carefully inspected the street in both directions from the yard gate, and slid swiftly up to

Fourth Avenue Hall a block along toward the Papernode the darkness of a cave struck off its center left hand and he dashed toward it, passing the beams against the rocks as he went along the edge of it and before a statue and returned with a rock from the edge of the hole. A series of notes had been uttered by the bird and he perceived that, like the first note, the same bird was

The house on that side of the staple was pulled over, but making a house under the pile of the staple house and let forward inside. A great number of the fish, being left behind, were pulled out and turned out to see to be in a house and after the whole. Like a man's face. He found the house on the side of the lake, after the whole house at last and there it was. Nothing but light water. The house was on the side of the lake and a couple of minutes he and the rest were outside on the lake. When the house was done.

Following the attack at the end of June, Street has received the yet greater and more rapid growth. The square has been without interruption for months the most vigorous relation can be known. A couple of weeks before reaching the Indian reservation. Near the Junction of the river, after the railroad and the highway, into the country, all on his right sides, including some of the most of the swampy land. A couple of days must have been left for the swamp, but they looked normal for a moment. And he estimated he was in a nation grown in the place where a thick growth of trees, including the spruce. The growth, but it was little more than that of the forest was turned to its end with trees, a of feeling or a of discomfort (and the house to a tree and the house. 1911.

He was surprised and irritated at the manner in which had suddenly been over him. It was not so much physical as mental for the man after him the first thought to reflect the p.d. at the moment after he felt safe to be down and rest was filled with stress and anguish. That the moment he heard tell of his own he went.

The fact was that he had had the sheep for two nights, and in the meantime he had ridden from the Spring Hills to the Big Bar V, and from there eight miles out town. The day on which he had spent making round pen fences for Moe, two whose wife "Sleep" had a ways been so much more than a matter of convenience to him, and he had puttered all the rest he needed in the saddle on the way back to the ranch. Years of routine

in the Badlands had pushed rest and sleep into an inferior position, and even now, sitting in Canada and assuming his present intermittent task of woodchuck hunting, Police detective, he had followed his custom of sleeping anywhere he found himself at the most convenient time—usually on bed at the ranch he shared with Mike.

It was a most rough when he awakened. Strange as his surroundings were, there was no embarrassment in the glance he threw about. Always in walking he was possessed of spring intonation. A lifetime of wandering was marked by longer had done than for him. Even while he slept an extra sense seemed to keep watch over him.

With a quick glance at his watch, to verify his estimate of the hour, he moved the horse farther into the ravine where the grass was untrampled, and then lay down once more.

This time he did not sleep. While he lay there on the prairie above the town the night before he had formed a plan, but now as he reconsidered it he realized the risk it involved, its many weaknesses, and he was glad that he had taken time to think it over.

After a long time he appeared to have come to a decision. He rose, examined the fastening of the horse's rein, and started hastily away to the entrance to the ravine. There he passed through the trees. Before him the hillside fell gradually away to the lower level, and with the town was built. From where he stood he could see to the distance the railway station and beyond it the Mounted Police barracks. From such a distance it must have been almost the only spot where such a clear view was to be obtained, for the irregularity of the cut bank was confusing, and for the most part covered with trees and thickets.

He could not see the Indian encampment though he knew it to be within a hundred and fifty yards from where he stood, concealed by interfering hills and trees. He could hear the dogs barking the pack of dogs that attack almost every Indian encampment, many had starved features that had too often made his work doubly dangerous. At the sound his nose wrinkled up, his teeth bared, and he hissed his dog suggestively.

Not more important things were before him. Keeping carefully to the cover of the trees, he crept out to the more open level ground. Step by step, watching carefully and picking the best cover, he advanced toward the camp. Three openings

in the cutbank on his left as he went along he examined before passing to ensure himself against surprise.

At last he lay down behind a flap-jack where he could look over the camp. The afternoon was wearing along and a rising excitement shined in his cracked eyes. He had made sure of course that he was down wind from the dogs. He could see them prowling about foraging looked by every foot that could reach them, but they were strictly camp dogs without individual owners.

The life of the camp was beginning to move more busily with the fading heat of the day. The sun sitting above the cutbank far to the west bay and the town still packed out every patch and rent in the ugly wigwags and Blue Pete's nose wrinkled with disgust. He hoped that he was missed in such a camp and such wigwags though his Indian mother had kept hers in good repair and clean.

Several Indian boys appeared and squatted in the open sunny space in the heart of the camp. There they would remain until the sun was down and the chill of evening drove them indoors or to more active pursuits while their squaws maddled about preparing the evening meal. Hordes of children and dogs played about the tents.

Blue Pete hid his eyes in the children. They settled on a girl of about six who appeared to direct their games following her wherever she went. Presently a sigh of relief broke from him.

His attention flickered from the little girl to the group of beavers then of animals to the western sky.

In the deepening shadows he gazed nearer and finally slid into a rut in the cutbank. A well tracked path led through into an open valley and he moved with unerring caution. Before him a young Indian pointed and seated at the foot of the slope his head in his hands was the day herder. He appeared to be asleep.

Blue Pete regarded him closely for several minutes then with a grin started his way along the slope higher up and lay down. It had grown darker and was darker still where the hills crowded out the fading sunlight. Blue Pete knew the routine the night herder would send a one to take over.

The night of cooled rope beside the sleeping Indian brought a burst of amusement to the half breed's face. Carefully he slid down the slope and with a leap landed on the Indian's back shutting off his outcry with one powerful hand. The

Indian struggled madly for a brief minute, but the rope swung over his shoulders and down, pinning his arms to his sides.

It had grown too dark to fear recognition, so that Blue Pete was really enjoying himself. His free hand found the Indian's necktiekerchief, and he jerked it loose and tied it tightly across the helpless fellow's lips.

In a few seconds the rope was securely knotted. One of the ponies was easily caught and brought to where the Indian lay. As the half-breed stooped to raise him a sound from the entrance to the ravine sent him scurrying in that direction. Close to the path he lay down. It was too dark to require other concealment.

An Indian came slouching along the path. He made no sound now, yet he had no thought of danger. Blue Pete waited until he was almost on him, then he sprang forward and struck. The blow caught the Indian on the side of the chin and he crumpled to a heap and lay still.

No need to test the effect of the blow, and Blue Pete hurried back to his first victim, threw him across the pony, and led him from the ravine.

Back where he had left his own horse, rather, the one he had stolen, he dropped the Indian, led the pony farther into the ravine, and tied it securely.

By the time he rode into the open the Indian encampment was settling down for the night. The children were still abroad, squeezing a greater lust of amusement into the few remaining minutes of the day. But the little girl was no longer in sight. Furious, disappointed and temporarily defeated, Blue Pete warned the encampment to find her. Suddenly she shot from a wigwam.

He had dismounted, but his horse was only a few yards away, and he hurriedly mounted. With a tingle of elation that at last the time for action had arrived, he struck spurs into his mount and dashed straight for the camp.

The dogs heard him first, and an excited barking arose. The children stopped their games as his moving form came into sight in the indistinct light. Blue Pete raced toward them. They scattered at the last moment, all except the little girl. She stood her ground almost with defiance. Here and there other Indians appeared at the tent flaps.

The half-breed swept forward, raced close to the girl, reached down, and swept her up before him.

Shouts of fear and excitement rang out as he tore away toward the railway track. The thrill of success surged through him, and his lips opened for the triumphant "Yip-ee " that marked his moments of unusual elation. But he managed to choke it off in time. That cry would have betrayed him.

Up the railway track he raced. His broncho sure-footed, did not stumble on the uneven ties. Reaching the top, the half-breed set off straight to the south. There thirty miles away in the Cypress Hills, he knew he would be safe from pursuit.

CHAPTER VIII

INFORMATION

SERGEANT MAHON visited the camp. He had not gone immediately with One Ear. A word or two from the Inspector, before he had time to leave the barracks, altered the plan. Instead, he had gone once more to the stable from which the horse had been stolen. There he carefully took the measurements of the hoof marks, noting every peculiarity. He was glad of the change of orders, for he had something to satisfy in his own mind, and he might need all the information he could get.

On his way back to the barracks he turned into the Royal Hotel yard. A trio of cowboys from the T-Inverted-R were mounting their bronchos to start on the long ride to the ranch, and they greeted him with uncalculated terror edging their mounts away from him. One contended that he "ain't done nothin' cepin' guzzle all the Royal's best booze."

A companion gave the jest more point by snarling "Yu sure did, Hicky 'an' we paid for it."

The third puncher sidled his horse up to the Sergeant. "Heard yu got rustlers right here in town, Sarge. Was it from the barracks they stole? If yu don't mind keep 'em in town. But what the hell does anybody need a cayuse in town for, anyways? If yu d ast me I'd say somebody's pullin' yer leg—tryin' to get the Mounties an' the street cops fightin'. Got the rustler yet, Sarge?"

"I've a fair idea about him, Jim," replied Mahon. "But we're in no hurry. We're waiting till he gets out of town. Anyway, it was a young broncho, it'll live till we get it back."

They bade him good-night and rode at a racing speed into the street. Mahon stood for a time staring at the open gate, wondering if there might not be something in the cowboy's suggestion. He welcomed the thought, encouraged it, for something less pleasant kept intruding into his mind.

Presently he moved on and entered the stable.

Later he strolled through the back door into the hotel. A bartender saw him from the bar as he passed along the hallway and turned after him.

"Lookin' for anybody, Sergeant?"

Mahon leaned against the counter on which lay the register, and carelessly turned the leaves.

"Any visitors the last couple of days, Reddy?"

"Half a dozen punchers. Mostly they don't register. By the time they get this far they're too drunk to write their names. Anything wrong?"

"Nothing. Just looking around. Stable emptier than usual, I see. You've got Blue Pete's pinto out there. Where's the breed?"

Reddy shrugged. "Say, you kids sure keep your eyes on him, eh? Well, I don't blame you. Dashed if he doesn't always give me the feeling he's going to hit the high spots any moment, and the rest of us must duck under the table. And then dashed if he doesn't fool me. What gets me is the way he manages to keep within the law. But it's probably Indian cunning and good common sense—the last comes from his white father's side. Dangerous chaps breeds, though, I always say. Never know what they're going to do."

"Is he in town?" Mahon enquired still.

Reddy shook his head. "Johnny tells me he come in a couple of nights ago and said to look after the pinto. He was clearing out for a few days down Lethbridge way. Ain't seen him since." He shot a glance about the room, and leaned nearer to whisper in a hoarse voice. "Want him for anythin'?"

The Sergeant waved an indifferent hand. "Oh, no. I found his broncho, but I hadn't seen the half-breed since—oh a couple of days ago. I wondered what had happened to him that's all. Well, I'll toddle along. He started for the door.

"Will I tell him you want him badly?" grinned Reddy.

"Tell him what you like—so long as it's the truth," replied Mahon gravely.

Instead of leaving by the front door he changed his mind as he reached it, turned back, and went out through the back door to Main Street. The Inspector never noticed anything that happened on South Railway Street, and Mahon had no wish to face questions that might drag from him some show of the disquiet he felt concerning his half-breed friend.

What in the world does it mean? he asked himself as he crossed the railway track toward the barracks. Is it another crazy mess he's getting himself into? Whatever it is, it means trouble for us. I wonder if he's finding out and how he's doing it. I don't like it.

He reported to the Inspector, and next day set out for the Indian encampment.

What he found there to add to what One Ear had reported was of little consequence. He Who Shoots did not appear, and only One Ear would talk. In fact, only a few of the older Indians seemed to be in the camp in addition to One Ear, but Mahon knew that was arranged. The experience of the second Indian Blue Pete had knocked unconscious was not mentioned. For Blue Crow, the Indian the half-breed had trampled on, had been found. He could tell little.

Mahon felt depressed and defeated, but it was only in part due to his failure to run over anything of value. Indeed the Inspector's irritability growing days affected him little in the interviews that followed. But when the next day his superior got down to directing his mind to the problem, he listened.

There's a damned sight more to this than we see on the surface, Mahon, and no one knows it better than you.

Mahon flushed guiltily. I think you're right, sir. I've been wondering a lot. I'm convinced the Indians are far from frank, yet they want our help in some way.

Do you think there's any connection between the murder and the kidnapping?"

Mahon's eyes told. I can't work out what connection there could be, sir. They involve the same camp, that's all."

The Inspector's head shook irritably. We must do something pretty soon. The trail is getting colder all the time. Suddenly he looked straight into Mahon's face. Strikes me this is the perfect place to bring Blue Pete in.

You mean about the murder or the kidnapping?"

I'm connecting them. He could do things there that we couldn't hope to do. If nothing turns up within the next

couple of days I'm going to call him in. If he'll take it on, of course."

Mahon left as soon as he could, and that night he slept little. What he had discovered—or suspected—from his discoveries—worried him the more because he could not understand. He rose unrefreshed and irritable.

To clear his mind a little he took a walk along the Esplanade. He had almost reached the end of the street when an excited man burst from a door and leaped down the verandah steps, shouting to him. The Sergeant's heart almost stopped beating, for it was Heath, the owner of the stolen horse.

He's back, he's back, he's back. Fairway's back in the stable."

"You mean your horse has been found?" asked Mahon, wondering why he felt so relieved.

"Found nothing. He was in the stable this morning when I happened to go out. Would you believe it, there he was, saddle in its place on the peg and everything. And Fairway's in fine shape—seems almost to have enjoyed a holiday or something. I haven't been dreaming, have I? Hell, it makes me feel like a fool."

Mahon tried to laugh. "At least you're a lucky fool. I can vouch for it that the horse was not there day before yesterday. Perhaps the rustler was disappointed in Fairway, and didn't think him worth his feed."

"Well," laughed Heath, "perhaps he isn't all I've cracked him up to be, but I'm satisfied to have him back to feed, and no questions asked. Sorry I bothered the Mounties."

"It's our job," said Mahon absently, and walked away.

He made directly for the barracks. The Inspector had been telephoned the news, and was thinking it over.

"What in blazes do you make of it, Mahon? It's damned mysterious—and aggravating. Who'd steal a horse and then return it in a few days? And a good horse it is, too."

"Perhaps we've only been dreaming there's a murder, too. I hope so. I suppose there's nothing more for us to do now—about the horse, I mean. We've enough to do without trying to run down borrowers. Heath isn't complaining. He threw up his hands. 'It's a new sort of move. Affects me like—like some of the twisted stunts Blue Pete puts on for us.' His eyes brightened. 'You don't think he had anything to do with it, do you?'"

Mahon was prepared. "Why should he be mixed up in it now?"

"Well, it solves one problem, in a way. But we still have to find that North Wind, and the package that was kidnapped, and I'm not going to wait much longer to get action out Blue Pete. He's had nothing to do since he got back from the Badlands. He might like a job. Anyway, we'll try him. Has he been in town lately?"

Mahon admitted reluctantly that he had seen the half-breed a few days before. "I may run across him again, I don't think he's gone back to the ranch yet."

"You may, or you may not," scoffed the Inspector. "And if you have to go out to the place that I you aren't apt to come across him there either. If he knows we want him, he's worse to locate than a flea. But we must get hold of him. Find out if he's in town, or if anyone knows where he is. Otherwise we'll have to ride out and either we turn or tell them to have him call. He frowned at the blotter before him."

"I'm afraid we're riding out there so often people will begin to suspect how we use him."

Mahon resumed the conversation with Medley, the bartender at the Royal. "It doesn't look as if they suspect us yet now. He reported the conversation in part concerning any mention of the trip Blue Pete had outlined."

The Inspector nodded his satisfaction. "That's fine. Once they know he's making for us we'll have to drop him again, and you know what that will mean to him and to us. We'll get along out and make enquiries."

The enquiries had not even started when Whiskers came loping along beside Mahon on Fourth Avenue and stopped. They were midway between the two newspaper offices before a vacant lot, so that no one could get near enough to over-hear.

Mahon placed a hand on the pant's neck and scratched it. He looked reprovingly up at the half-breed's face. "Pete, he said, 'you're on the way to a lot of trouble again.'"

Blue Pete grinned uneasily. "Ain't Heath found that cayuse o' his yet?"

"He has. And only you and I know where it was. No, I mean you and I know who took it."

"Anyways, he's back, ain't he an 'nobody hurt?'"

"Unless it's Little Pine. He looked keenly into the half-breed's flickering eyes.

"She s—she s back too. I didn't hurt her none."

"You kidnapped her. Do you know what the penalty is?"

"I had to do it. Yuh put it . . ."

"There s a little matter too," Mahon interrupted, "of an Indian trussed up and left where he wasn't found for more than a day."

"He wasn't hurt none neither," said Blue Pete, with a grin. "Yuh put it up to me to find out what North Wind is, and that wasn' no other way I cud see. I was jes down wot yuh ast me to do."

"Do you mean you found out what we want?" demanded the Sergeant.

Blue Pete looked away over the buildings and rubbed his chin. "That lil papoose s a mighty smart kid. I didn' borrow that hoss fer nothin'. I cuda used Whiskers, but anybody'd recognize her."

"So you stole the horse to help you to kidnap Little Pine. That s just lovely. The Inspector'll tell you how clever."

A look of consternation came over Blue Pete's face. "Yuh won't tell th' Inspector will yuh, 'Sergeant? I didn' hurt nobody, not bad an' I got wot yuh wanted—purty near."

"You mean you know where North Wind is?"

"I know whar he started fer—with his squaw. Tha're a dang long way away by this time. Now yuh kin git after 'em yerself."

"But Pete, we were thinking . . ." Mahon stopped. "This was no time or place to break the news that the Inspector expected the half-breed to take up the chase. The Inspector will have to know what you have to tell. You needn't mention how you got the information, and I won't, though it's another time when I have to break my vows for you. Come down to the barracks and talk it over."

Blue Pete's face lengthened. "I ain't much fer lym', Sergeant. I don't like talkin' to th' Inspector wen I gotta lie. He alius seems to know."

"You won't need to lie. I don't think he'll press to find out where you learned what you have to tell. Come down with me now, openly. Everyone thinks we're just keeping track of you after the record you have."

They turned back down Main Street, and reached the barracks. A few saw them, Blue Pete riding the pinto with a dejected look of guilty embarrassment. It surprised no one, aroused no suspicion of the real nature of the visit.

Blue Pete's lawlessness was a byword. Everyone knew that his early life had been filled with rustling—that he had fled to Canada before the guns of avenging ranchers and cowboys, that he had worked for a time with the Mounted Police,¹ but had returned to rustling when a thoughtless judge had refused to accept the expert evidence of a former rustler. After that he had returned and the public thought the Mounted Police had been unable to collect sufficient evidence to convict him, and had let him alone, merely keeping a close eye on him. That he had ever since acted as a detective for them no one suspected.

Before the barracks he dismounted, dropped the loose reins to the ground and entered after Mahon. The few who saw smiled significantly and forgot. It was as the Inspector wished.

CHAPTER IX

HIS JOB

FROM beyond his window in the barracks Inspector Barker saw the half-breed and the Sergeant the moment they appeared around the corner from Fourth Avenue, and a smile of satisfaction creased his face. It boded well for his plans that Blue Pete appeared to come willingly. No one, he admitted to himself, could get his way with the half-breed as could Sergeant Mahon, it was one of the things he held to the credit of his subordinate.

Between the half-breed and the Inspector a curious relationship had developed. They liked and respected each other, though, as the latter always remarked at the end of a case the former had carried through, the half-breed's unconventional methods were responsible for much of his grey hair.

Never had he been able to effect any change in those methods. With a goal in view, Blue Pete set about reaching it in his own way. It was either the only way he could envisage, or the shortest route to the desired end. That route, he maintained, was his business alone, the end the Inspector's sole concern. The trouble from the official point of view, was that the Inspector was forced to recognize the fact that Blue Pete's methods were the only ones that would have

¹ *Blue Pete*—*Half-breed*. *Blue Pete*—*Detective*.

succeeded, largely because the only cases given him were, or promised to be, beyond the capacity of the Mounted Police.

The Inspector had come to rely on his unofficial assistant. As yet Blue Pete had never failed to do what he set out to do— with the qualification that sometimes it was not the complete job the Inspector wished. The capture of a criminal, with the law to set the punishment, is the legal way to handle a crime. To Blue Pete it appeared sufficient sometimes, to put the criminal, beyond repeating the crime.

Pressing the bell beneath his desk the Inspector gave orders that Mahon and Blue Pete should be admitted immediately to his office. To hasten the meeting he even left his office door open.

At a sign from Constable Priest Mahon ushered his companion into the office, and followed. The Inspector greeted the half breed with unusual joviality, grasping his hand and wringing it. It was difficult for him to assume such a pose. Thirty years of Mounted Police duty in the Canadian West had made life too serious for smiles.

"Glad to see you, Pete. Sit down and light up."

He had taken care to spill some of his—and Blue Pete's— favourite tobacco from his pouch on the blotter and the half-breed did not hesitate. To fill his corn-cob pipe from the Inspector's special brand almost made an interview worth while.

"You haven't been in to see me since—since you got back," the Inspector complained. "I thought we parted friends out there south of the Hills."

The half breed pressed the ball of a huge thumb into the bowl of his pipe and struck a match under the edge of the desk.

"Shure shure." He drew the flame unto the bowl. "Bin party busy."

The Inspector made a sound of disbelief. "Don't tell me that. The 3-Bar-Y runs without you like a clock. No one out there depends on you. Even Mira has learned that she must do without you now and then. In Texas you've got the best foreman in the West—and, on a pinch, Mira can ride herd with any cowboy. You needn't tell me you need a bed to sleep in, either, you've slept on the ground far more times than you ever saw a bed."

Blue Pete Cudlow

I was down in the Hills, muttered the half-breed.

"Of course. You couldn't stay away from the Hills long," laughed the Inspector. "Sergeant Mahon tells me he saw you there. Thanks for relieving our minds about North Wind hiding there. We'd still be combing the Hills. I suppose if you hadn't assured us he hasn't been there since the murder."

Mahon stepped forward. "Pete tells me he knows where North Wind has gone."

The Inspector's manner instantly became businesslike. "Is that so? Good. I didn't know he was on that job already."

Both Mahon and Blue Pete dropped their eyes before the keen ones of the elder man.

He happened to get hold of the information," said Mahon.

"Knocked some poor Indian on the head to get it. I suppose. Oh, well. I'm not asking questions so long as he can help us. He turned back to the desk. "Him-m! A few minutes ago I found out something myself. That little Indian girl is back. She's uninjured," and she refuses to talk, she won't tell what happened to her. One ear had someone telephone about it, he doesn't wish to face us again. Him-m. Strange coincidence. It would make an interesting study to trace the connection. But we've other things to do—just yet."

His piercing eyes moved from the half-breed to the Sergeant, the corners of his lips twitched. "They're both back whole, so I'm letting it drop. And Little Pine is a clever girl. Him-m!"

Blue Pete squatted into the bowl of his pipe, one crooked eye closed. "Some o' them Neche kids is smart."

"Him-m! I'd say in this case her kidnapper was smart—or Little Pine would remember and talk. However, this is wasting time. With that cleared up, somewhat, we face the bigger task. Where is North Wind? You say you know?"

"Gone north an' west," said Blue Pete.

"Where?"

Partly certain to be out there among them Neches in the foothills west o' Red Deer. Lots o' them that Crees an' Stoney, most of 'em."

You appear to know the district. When were you there?"

Never was there. Jes that I gotta know suthin' 'bout the Neches. I run up ag'in' 'em too often to forget wot I hear 'bout 'em."

"In that case," said the Inspector more ingratiatingly leaning forward and placing a hand on the dark one that lay on the desk, "you're just the man we want. North Wind is a murderer and the Mounted Police must punish murder. And you're almost one of us. That district is far out of bounds for me—*chisau*. But North Wind is my job and no one else's. Besides if I gave it over to someone who knows nothing about him and the Blackfeet he'd be sure to snuff it or make the chase last for years. Will you undertake it, Pete—for me?"

A slow smile spread over Blue Pete's face. "Wot's the trouble anyway. Ain't it best to let 'em kill each other off an' let it go at that?"

The Inspector assumed an expression of shocked surprise. "Pete, the law doesn't recognize that sort of thing and I'm here to uphold the law. Not," he murmured with a shrug, "that the idea hasn't its good points. But look at it this way. When we get North Wind t'll be another Indian out of the way. A murderer pays with his life. It was diplomacy as the Inspector seldom used it, but he was willing to take almost any course to ensure the half-breed's assistance.

Blue Pete rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Wal it's this way. I been away all summer at *Mina wota wota* thanks she's got some *lata* on me for the rest of the year.

But if you refuse this job she'll see little of you anyway for you're seldom at home. She's used to it. Perhaps she thanks more of you because I bring you so seldom.

Blue Pete was interested. "Yuh know Inspector maybe yuh're right that. I often wondered why I can't see no other reason. Jes the same. I'll get North Wind down here some-er as I'll look after him.

If we had him down here we'd look after him ourselves. Look here, Pete, you've been back around the ranch for a month and you know you've got to be kept busy or you'll get into trouble. I

I get into the worst trouble when I'm busy, you say."

The Inspector smiled in spite of himself. "But this is exactly the sort of job you like.

That the half-breed was tempted was evident from the sober look on his face. He slouched forward in the chair staring at the floor. "Wotchu want me to do—shoot him for yuh?"

"I never said that. You're not to shoot at all— unless
less of course you must in self-defense."

"Who tells me when I gotta shoot or be shot?"

The corners of the Inspector's lips twitched. "North
Wind is a deadly shot. I'm told. You must keep that in
mind, of course. If you can't bring him in without killing
him, well, it would put me in a nasty position. I'd have
to repudiate you. I'd have to say I had nothing to do with
you. He ain't going to be taken easily, but I also know
what you can do. In this case I want you to do it."

"Want me to bring him in?"

Inspector Barker remembered another occasion when Blue
Pete had brought in a criminal, and the occasion was an
embarrassing one. The half-breed had pursued a rustler
across the border into Montana, had trussed him up and
brought him back into Canada, and up to Medicine Hat.
And the Inspector had been forced to let the fellow go, glad
to have him clear out with no further trouble. Blue Pete
had never understood, had never forgotten, or forgiven.

The Inspector cleared his throat. "I have no way of
knowing what the occasion may demand. What concerns
me is that North Wind is a murderer and I've got to get
him."

"A dog from mud, 45 don't eat much, an' that wudn' be
no more trouble fer anybody," suggested Blue Pete.

Punishment is not for you, Pete. Remember that, just
as you remember that North Wind is dangerous.

I ain't apt to forget it. But this is September, an' the
winter starts early out that. It's noble goin' to carry on
into the winter, an' I know the winters in the foothills. The
Sergeant n me does, an' North Wind is farther north, whar
the winters is worse.

You'll have to face that, of course. But winter has no
threat for you. Don't make foolish excuses. You can set out
right away, if you're sure of your information. Perhaps the
Neches have pulled your leg.

Blue Pete rose and tapped his pipe empty on the edge of
the desk. "I'm bankin' on it," he said. "I wudn' waste time
goin' if I didn't. I'll fix it up th' Mra. an' mebbe beat
the winter."

The Inspector's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. Blue Pete
slowly filled his pipe once more from the scattered tobacco,
and without another word started for the door.

'Good luck' called the Inspector 'and good hunting'

For answer the half-breed's hand slid into his chaps and a revolver appeared. It flapped into the air and landed in the position to be of most service.

The door closed behind him. Inspector Barker groaned. 'And that,' he sighed 'is the start of another headache.'

CHAPTER X

TRouble starts early

RED DEER half way between Calgary and Edmonton is a town of some importance in the Canadian West. It is the largest town between Alberta's two cities, and it centres a good farming district.

Situated on the Red Deer River, it has attained some fame from the fossil remains discovered on the river banks.

Far to the west, about one hundred miles away, lie the Rocky Mountains, the land between irregularly cultivated and sparsely inhabited. The first real life to the west is found in the Indian encampments scattered through the foothills, a profitable, certainly satisfactory, centre for trapping and hunting. It was among these encampments that Blue Pete decided his work lay. Little Pine had kept her ears open, and to the half-breed she had opened her lips.

The train landed him at the small station in the early morning, and until the town awakened he dozed in the waiting room. In the pack sack he carried was all he needed for a trip of almost any duration. All his life he had felt well equipped with nothing more than two revolvers, a .45 and a .38 a rifle and his jumbo Whippers. What he needed from day to day he helped himself to as he went along.

But as he looked down on the brown waterproof bag he carried he wondered, and twinges of misgiving made him uneasy.

He foresaw one particular phobia: he hated the mountains. He had worked amidst their terrifying peaks for the Mounted Police on one occasion, and the experience had left memories he would gladly have forgotten. After a lifetime on the prairie or amid heights no more unpressive than those of the

Montana Redskins and the Express Hotel, the towering peaks of the Rockies reflected him, were at last made him feel small and unimportant and insignificant.

A couple of their assignments had taken him to the foot hills in the south not far from Mexico and even there he had been unhappy. Now, as he started at the task at hand, he had a grim notion that previous experience had prepared him for what was to come before again, because Mexican Hat.

As the train waited, he took his stand before the waiting room window, watching the flow of the street. Three swift, vigorous strides took him to the platform and back. From a pile of cars through them he took a few hasty glances. As yet he saw but one thing, but a man, a stout, rounder who had disappeared the moment the train was gone.

The station master's indifference had changed him somewhat, but it was true that Indians were not unusual about the town and that was the one he had assumed. He remembered an Indian sufficiently well to pass for one and in truth he was a chief of the mountain tribe.

As he looked out on the street a group of four Indians crossed the sidewalk, some distance away and disappeared before a store whose front they just passed.

He was interested, though he could not have told why. Perhaps it was that it was unusual for Indians to maintain such a tight group, perhaps he saw in them men he might meet again in the course of his work. Thus one entered the store, the others remaining on their heels on the outside. These minutes he refused them were a tremendously special hot fast and powerful. Presently the one who had remained inside came out with a parcel which he proceeded to divide among his companions.

Blue Peter hurried from the station and along the platform, taking cover behind the lavatory where he was nearest the Indians. The four disappeared up the street where the hangings had them.

The hot food was useless. There was something strange about it all but he could not imagine why, he thought so, and he berated himself.

Geometric Pete, he guessed, where all got up, as tight reasonable. You're oughts was shored, bent, action. Fast thing you know you'll be stuck for the trees, as that won't help you none what you're gone. What you're gone than Naches'll know every damn tree, as you gotta learn

He picked up the pack-sack and set out along the street. Not a movement, not an open door, escaped him as he passed along. Without admitting it even to himself, he was looking for the Indians.

The door of the store where they had made the purchase stood wide open, and on the spur of the moment he crossed to it and entered. A couple of early customers were being served by an old man who looked up as he entered and grinned.

'Forgot something?' he asked. 'You couldn't want any more 45's you got all I had, anyway. You . . . Oh I see you ain't the one I sold 'em to a few minutes ago.'

Blue Pete pointed to a brightly coloured handkerchief on a string over the counter.

"How much?"

"Like that?" It'll be thirty-five cents."

The half-breed rummaged in his pocket and produced the money, took the handkerchief from the line and left the store.

He felt hurried, but could not imagine why. In the box the Indian had broken open and shared with his companions was filled with 45's. There'd be a lot of shooting in that box—a lot of shooting . . . a lot of shooting.

A sign over a building caught his eye, and he turned into the wide doorway beneath. The familiar horsey odour of a livery stable he whiffed almost rapturously. A man emerged from a small office just inside the door, and stopped at sight of his visitor. It was plain that he did not relish dealing with an Indian.

Blue Pete paid no attention, but continued back along the rear of the stalls, his eyes fixed on the row of ramps. The livery-stable proprietor set out after him.

"Want anything?" he asked.

Blue Pete stopped behind a horse that had turned to whinny at him. He slid into the stall, running a hand over the rump and down a leg.

"Want horn," he grunted, pointing.

The liveryman laughed. "I don't let my horses out to Indians. No offence, but that's my rule."

"I boy," jerked the half-breed. He was playing the Indian rôle well.

The man's head shook. "You've landed on the best I've got. I don't wish to sell. What do you want to buy a broncho here for, anyway? I thought you Indians helped yourselves

to them in the open. There are wild ones off toward the foothills, they tell me."

This town, foothills far away," said Blue Pete.

"Yes, that's true."

Blue Pete pulled a roll of bills from his pocket. "How much?"

"Have you a saddle?"

"Buy saddle too."

The man blew a note of surprise. "That is worth business. You must be pretty flush, judging by that. I'd been robbing a bank?"

Buy horse, an saddle, snapped Blue Pete.

Well, I'll find you a hundred for the horse and saddle.

I pay, Blue Pete, snorted out the amount, and held it out. The man accepted the money with frowning eyes.

"By gosh, I don't think you Indians ever made a deal without a lay's bargaining. I've lived in Red Deer for eighteen years, but I'm still learning. I see. He waved a hand at a row of saddles hung on wooden pegs against the wall. "Take your pick."

Blue Pete walked straight to one of the saddles, entered the stall, untied the horse he had selected, and buckled the saddle over its back. The previous owner held out a bridle, and in a moment Blue Pete was in the saddle.

As he settled into place a sharp report echoed through the stable from somewhere on the street. The everyman whirled.

That ain't no backshot, it's a shot. Some real action, I guess. But we don't have much. Hey, look out!"

He reaped quickly as Blue Pete struck spurs to the horse and dashed through the door. In a flash he understood why he had felt so on edge since seeing those two Indians.

As he swung full speed into the street he was forced to draw on savagely to avoid a collision with another racing horse. His own mount reared back its head but within a few inches of an Indian head low over his mount as he dashed past. A shot rang out from a building almost across the street then another.

Too much was happening at once for Blue Pete to take it all in. His first thought was to duck the bullet fired at him by the racing Indian, then he saw three more tearing toward him from behind the building from which the shots had come. A few citizens were dashing for cover, and a second gun opened fire from a window opposite the building.

But the oncoming Indians appeared unmolested.

Blue Peter's eyes caught the sign over the building from which the first shots had come. It was a bank.

The three Indians were almost on him. Each carried a gun and the three guns pointed at him. In a movement too quick for the eye to record, his own gun was out and firing from the hip. And with each shot an Indian slumped from the saddle and tumbled into the street.

One still able to handle a gun lay coming at him. Blue Peter slid to the other side of his mount and fired over the saddle. He was too late to stop the bullet that came tearing through his sleeve, but his own bullet caught the Indian in the center of the forehead.

In the meantime the town was aroused and bullets were flying about him. He remembered the Indian who had escaped the one who had challenged him first and had fired at him, and his anger flared. Whirling his mount about in a shower of bullets, he set out in pursuit.

He had no more than cleared the town when he realized the fix into which he had got himself. He had shot and killed three men. They had plainly tried to rob the bank and had earned what they got, but that would not help in leaving him free to outface the job he had undertaken for the Inspector. Indeed, some might think it a worse disreputable citizen would get doubly aware that he was one of the robbers. His first worry therefore was to get out of the way. The anger that had over come him at the memory of the shot the first Indian had taken at him evaporated for the moment and he considered the best way to escape.

He was headed toward the north. The street crossed the river and as he thundered over the bridge he could still hear shouting behind him. There would be no active chase, however, with the Mounted Police were on the trail. It would leave him ample time to make his escape.

He recalled then that the three Indians he had shot had carried canvas bags. They would contain the money they had stolen. The one who had escaped had probably been left as a lookout and had turned tail at the first sign of danger. Of well the money was safe. The Inspector would commend him when he knew. He would be taking the law in his own hands was the thing the Inspector reproved him for most consistently. At any rate he was safe for the time being and no one had had time to recognize him.

He remembered the liveryman. Would he offer an alibi? The answer was in the negative. To the whole town, and to the liveryman, the presence of a stranger in the stable would merely be a move to keep the liveryman from his front office, where he would have seen what was going on across the street.

There was one thing about it that puzzled him. Indians, in his experience, were not bank-robbers. Their most desperate crimes, in these days, were waylaying stages or pay-cars, or robbing ranch-houses and herds. Strange Indians, those, desperate fellows. And one remained alive to remember his intervention.

Later the half-breed was to know how important that was. For an Indian never forgets.

CHAPTER XI

THE BLIZZARD

FOR four miles he followed the road north at top speed. The country was rolling, so that for most of the time he was out of sight of any impulsive person who might have taken up the trail. In a hollow he turned from the road and struck across the open prairie. He had seen several farm-houses as he tore along, but where he was now not a building was in sight. All the way along the depression was no sign of anything man had done except two fences. In one he found a gate, the wire of the other he wrenched loose and held down to let his broncho pass.

After a long time he knew that he had passed the farms. Even from a height he could see no buildings, and the fences had long since disappeared. Before him lay open prairie, more broken than about Medicine Hat. Far away to the west he could dimly see the mountains and a shudder ran through him. They were misty miles away still, but in the clear air he could discern three snowy peaks.

He rode on. And presently a feeling of elation coursed through him. He had had the excitement his nature craved, it promised more excitement to come, and that was what he lived for—yes, even if he found it in the hated mountains before him.

The horse he had purchased was all he had thought of. It was fast and powerful and friendly, with an easy gait and a sure foot that defied buckers and starting dog holes.

Dismounting, he set the animal grazing where he ate some thing from his sack each time. The horse he remained near him, it seemed, was to share his future relationship.

That night he slept in the open beneath a half-dead tree beside a stream, not comfortably, and without a break. His horse he slept beside as a tank and rested.

In the early morning he set out again, always westward. The day was fine and threatening, and as he rode he kept examining the sky with satisfaction. He knew the period of the month, the Month's best season, one of the seasons always a half an inch longer. It was in mid-late September, and ending in a month and more the real winter. He had learned to be careful in the open in such a storm, but if caught in a snowed day. He kept looking about himself but for his horse he must have some sort of shelter.

He rode more easily as the horse passed through he could not hope to reach the perfection of the investigations of the earlier hunters in time, and there was nothing nearer.

The day darkened threatening, the wind rose. In the north-west it was dark now, and began to rain. Nothing seemed to be the day as an approaching season, a strange, unexpected. He looked about for what shelter the nature of the land provided. As for himself he had often taken shelter in the lee of a hill and set the storm blow over him, but that would not be for his horse. A hill might serve, but there was none in sight. Nervously he pushed on.

The mountains had disappeared beneath the lowering clouds, but he knew he should reach the foothills the next day. He had not found his mount earlier, and there appeared no reason for it. Besides, he wished to reach the mountains fresh and keen, he had no idea what might face him there.

The wind became more bitter. A snow-like storm had come, like a small storm, it was followed by others in a gust of wind. A menacing storm was coming, and he raised himself fearfully on the saddle to take a last look about him before the storm broke. From the north-west a wall of dark, white was visible racing toward him.

His glance turned the horizon—and off to the west-south-west something he saw drew a quick breath from him. Head

instant his heels flew sharply into the flanks of his surprised mount, and he was off toward it at top speed. Over his shoulder he could hear the storm overtaking him, and the wind whistled through his horse's tail. He crouched over the horn and urged it on.

Then the storm struck. It blinded him. The broncho fought to turn his back to the wind, but Blue Pete jerked him around and kept on. He knew he must be almost there, but he could see nothing. Or had the broncho veered in veering away? In such a blinding storm he might pass within a few feet of the building he had seen, and be unaware of it.

Suddenly, through the blanket, a lion light shone before him, and he reined to just in time to avoid crashing into an adobe wall. He shouted. A man came and stood beyond the gate, gazing through at him, a bearded fellow with a wild look in his eyes. He vanished, and a door opened noisily somewhere. A voice shouted to him.

This was stranger, and damned welcome.

Blue Pete rounded the corner. Light streamed from an open doorway, and in the bright oblong stood the man he had seen at the window.

Good, it's good to see someone, especially on a day like this. The man grasped the half-breed's hand and clung to it with both his own.

Blue Pete climbed from the saddle. "What'll I put him?" he asked, pointing a thumb toward the broncho.

Come right in. I'll look after the horse. This is my lucky day, for sure. You're the second, and I haven't seen a living soul since I visited the boys two weeks ago.

They went together to a mud stable at the back. It was comfortable enough, and there was another horse and plenty of grass.

The door of the hut closed them into a new world. Blue Pete looked about with frank surprise and approval. There was a stove with a pile of wood beside it, two easy chairs, a bed and two tables. One of the tables was piled with books.

The owner laughed as he noticed his visitor's surprise. "I do the best I can for myself," he said. "It's a pretty lonesome life on a sheep ranch. But today I've had a busy day with visitors. Another Indian went through this morning. Spend the night with me. Haven't seen more than half a dozen Indians, all told, in the last couple of years, either. Been out to Calgary, he said. Going to one of the camps

in the foothills, I suppose. I don't ask. He wouldn't talk much, but none of you do, eh? Oh, well, it's enough to have you around. It keeps my English up to do a bit of talking now and then.

I'm running sheep, you know. I aren't get nearer town, or the farmers and the ranchers would be down on me. I've two herders out on the ranges now. I'm worried about them and the sheep, but they're great chaps with sheep, and we usually pull through. A bored brings in my supplies once a month, and sometimes oftener. I could do with another. I'd take an Indian even."

He grinned sheepishly. There I go, always putting my foot in it. I talk too fast to think when I get a chance. There are Indians and Indians, just as there are whites and whites. I can tell by your looks you've got intelligence.

He stopped abruptly, and studied his visitor with wrinkled forehead. "Where are you from, and where are you making for?"

"Camp in foothills," replied Blue Pete. "Crees—friends."
"You're not a Cree."

"Pegan, from down south."

Strange the Indians I've seen of late. Couple of them a couple of weeks ago, an Indian and his pretty squaw. The quietest pair I ever had here. She never so much as opened her mouth except to eat, and he asked only a question or two. They seemed in a hurry to get on. I gave them some flour and salt. Travelling light they were. Funny to get supplies from me when they came from where my supplies come from. If they'd been whites I'd say they were skping.

Blue Pete listened to every word. "Friend come this way with squaw," he said. "Big man."

Might be him, sure's you're living, said the sheepman excitedly. "Now isn't that a coincidence? Ain't it a fact that it's a small world?" He threw a glance about the narrow walls of the hut. "And to think I run up against it away off here a hundred miles from nowhere. They didn't stay more'n a few minutes. The squaw was a good-looking, for an Indian, I mean," he added hurriedly. "Lots of braves are handsome fellows."

He leaned forward in a friendly way, and laid a hand on Blue Pete's knee. "Just to think what can happen to a fellow away off here! You'll be running across him out there, I suppose."

"Share hope so," replied Blue Pete.

"Well, tell them to drop in and spend a day or two with me on their way back." He winked. "And if he wants to leave the squaw with me I'll look after her. She looked as if she might have a roving eye. I didn't encourage her. I'm not taking chances with Indians." He reddened with embarrassment. "I mean, I don't pretend to know much about them, so I might easily do the wrong thing. Listen to that wind. You're damned lucky you struck this place when you did. There isn't another scratch of shelter this side the foothills. A few trees about thirty miles west—in the ravines, I mean. After that you'll be safe enough." He rose and went to the stove. "Well, let's eat. Sort of cosy with company, and I do talk. . . . I'm beginning to think I'll need a traffic cop soon."

CHAPTER XII

WITHOUT A HORSE

THE storm raged throughout the night and most of the following day, the snow heaping, in the wind, about the front and one side of the house to such a depth that next morning it was necessary to dig through a drift that reached to the eaves to get to the horses. On the south and part of the east sides of the house the grass was almost bare for a distance of three feet, but beyond that the snow piled steeply as high as the house.

All through the night the sheepman fretted about his sheep, though his talk was an effort to reason himself out of his fears.

"They're always looking for this storm," he said. "At this time of the year they feed where they can reach shelter in time. A sheep-herder becomes the best weather prophet in the world. He has to be or lose his sheep. South of here the country is more broken, though the foraging is good enough. That's where the herds are now. There's always a bank near at hand where they can crowd in out of the wind, and let the snow drift beyond them."

Some time during the morning hours he thought of another reason for reassurance. "The Mounties know where the herds

are they'll be out there through the storm searching for my men. Fine bunch of fellows about Red Deer. One or another always comes poking around every two or three months to see how I'm getting along. or if I'm running a hunt or something. Now you might say, but how can I find them? They're sure to come looking for me after this storm. Know much about their where you come from.

Blue Pete admitted in his heavily accented Indian accent none that he knew of them, but he still gave no hint where he was from. But the threat, for it was a threat, of a visit from a Mounted Policeman worried him. If he found there and returned might spoil everything. The Mounted Police would know of the bank robbery, they would be looking for the two who escaped. If he was considered one of them, it made him eager to get away.

Toward evening the squall ended, the sun came out and a brisk dew though the channels so far north was not so refreshing as at equal latitude. But where thirty below zero at midnight might be fifty above before daylight. But the wind was sucking up water and the snow visibly disappeared before it. So that by morning great patches of bare grass were visible and even the drift in the house had sunk to a wiggly mass no more than a foot deep.

It was noon however before he decided on leaving himself in the hands of the unknown sheepman and at that he was oppressed with a feeling that his horses had aroused some suspicion in the mind of his host. That disturbed him little. Once he was away he was waiting to take his chance. It was certain that within a couple of days at the most a Mounted Policeman would visit the hut and with the news that two Indians had passed that way so soon after the bank robbery there would be further investigation.

The chase would probably be on and now with some sort of direction. It would carry to the Indian encampments, and make his task more difficult. He almost regretted having found shelter from the storm, since the description the officer would be given would surely include his cracked eyes. There he could never hope to hide.

He was much nearer to meeting the Mounted Police than he thought. Only the instinct that warned him of approaching danger saved him.

Without conscious planning, he had kept as much as

possible to the lower levels since striking out from the road near Red Deer. Long after all risk of immediate pursuit had passed he avoided heights. Now, with one of the robbers ahead of him, he was more careful than ever.

About four in the afternoon, however, after a half hour's rest for himself and his horse, he climbed a slope searching for a depression that would lead more directly toward the mountains. His head had no more than raised about the upper level when, far to the south and slightly westward, he saw a rider approaching at a fast lope. A glance was enough: the brown working tunic of the Mounted Police was evident.

He ducked, but not before he had been seen. In some excitement he galloped back and his crooked eyes darted about in search of some place of concealment. There were no trees, but a coulee tended directly toward where he had seen the officer, and he raced into it until he feared that the pounding of his horse's hoofs might be heard.

The policeman, he knew, would search for him, but he would not expect that anyone wishing to avoid him would ride toward him.

To his consternation the coulee suddenly turned directly across the route the policeman would have to follow. At first it looked like a real danger, then he saw his chance. At some distant time the water that had flowed through the depression had gouged a shallow hole in the bank. Into this he rode and disappeared. Whiskers would have lain down at a word, but the strange bunch had to be thrown and held down.

In a very few minutes the oncoming police horse could be heard galloping nearer. It reached the coulee where the half-breed expected it, pounded down the slope and up the other side. In full view of the half-breed it appeared on the height above and followed it for a time. Had the policeman turned his head he could not have missed horse and rider in the hollow below, but he was intent on the country before him where Blue Pete had last been seen.

The policeman disappeared. With a sigh of relief the half-breed rose and let his mount lap her to his feet. And then the creature neighed.

It was a subdued sound, for the half-breed leaped to the open mouth and clamped the jaws together with his powerful hands, but to him it sounded like a battery of guns, and he stood holding his breath.

Get venged he grated. Yuh ornery cayuse yuh ain't got the sense of a gopher. Whicker I get on yuh I see I gotta larn yuh a lot o' things. . . . If I get a chance . . . An yuh ain't so bad anyway. But ef yuh go that agin I'll plug yer nose up an choke yuh to death. Yuh ef I hev to walk the rest o' the way an carry the saddle I kin help make self from a Netherland though it wudn't help me none fer not I gotta do 'n behave myself.

The silence from the upper level warned him that the policeman had heard, and he had pulled up to locate the sound. Blue Pete wondered what was best to do. The turn in the valley offered the chance he needed, and he leaped into the saddle and hurried around the bend. He could not be seen unless the policeman returned all the way.

If he were discovered he would have to ride for it. Thinking his chances over he was little alarmed. The police horse had certainly travelled far that day, and the stormy days before, and would not be fresh, whereas his own had had a rest. He knew too well the policeman's horse was not a broncho.

Around the bend he waited for further developments. He did not wish to risk the tramp of his horse being heard. Then, from a distance came distance it is where he thought the officer would be, came a faint Hello-o.

He did not answer, but urged his mount slowly along, and when sufficient distance intervened he broke it into a lope.

He was safe now, but his evident desire to evade the officer would be certain to arouse the latter's suspicions, and he must still avoid being seen. Fortunately the country was rapidly becoming more broken, and there was no difficulty in keeping out of sight.

As he rode his spirits rose. The very thought that a new danger was added to his task increased its attractiveness. That was characteristic. In its original form it had offered some danger, but the intrusion of the bank robbers, with the consequent shooting, and now the Mounted Police having a share in directing the chase, indicated more excitement ahead. It made the mountains less depressing.

He needed something like that now, for the snowy heights were in such plain view that he felt that in another hour or two he would be within their shadow.

Shortly before midnight the country became more broken, with patches of trees, and here and there a stream that had

to be larded. He had seen no sign of a trail since leaving the Red Deer road, and as yet only the sheepman's hut after the first forenoon. The snow-clad peaks rose bleakly in the clear air, the white of their precipitous sides extending into the tree line to show that the storm has raged there. A new breaknew filled the air, and as evening advanced it increased to a perceptible sharpness that made him search for shelter in which to spend the night.

It made him think of the approaching winter, and he wondered if luck would be so bad that his task would keep him there into the cold season. He began to question the provision he had made for such a season, the trustworthiness and endurance of his broncho, and what use it would be in the snow. Flitting back in his mind too was the certainty that some day he would have to face an investigation of the bank robbery. It would make his position uncomfortable. With the secrets imposed on him by Inspector Barker he was not free to reveal himself should the local detachment lay hands on him.

The forest growth thickened, but he advanced as far as he could in the fading light, and at last dismounted in a thick wood beside a meadow. Hobbling his broncho, he turned it loose to feed, and lay down in the solitary blanket he carried.

Contrary to his usual custom, he did not fall asleep immediately. A strange uneasiness kept intruding into his weariness. He decided it was the nearness of the mountains, and at last dropped into uneasy slumbers.

It was an uneasy sleep, and he awakened early. He did not set about the day's duties immediately, but lay wondering why he should feel such an urge for it. The thicket kept out much of the light of the rising sun, and he chided himself for an unreasonable sensitiveness. After a time, however, he could be still no longer, and he rose and pushed through to the meadow where he had left the broncho.

It was nowhere in sight.

The shock of the discovery, for he knew the animal would not wander from such a well-watered feeding-ground, sent him warring back to the thicket to think things over. He knew the bubbles would prevent it wandering far, even if it tried to, and the sun was as yet not hot enough to drive it to the shadows.

Working his way through the trees parallel with the edge

of the meadow he arrived at last at the other side. As he went along he examined the ground. Just beyond where the little stream that cut through the meadow was nearest the forest he found what he sought—fresh hoof marks. Among them he quickly traced those of his own broncho, as well as proof that it had left with the others, since here and there its marks were covered. All this had called for nothing but the ordinary powers of observation of one who carried his life in his hands. Besides, the broncho was an unusually large one which accounted for its value to the liveryman. Plainly too its hobbies had been removed.

That was all he needed: the Indians had come on the broncho and had carried it off. They had figured that without a horse its owner would be unable to overtake them, would scarcely dare to follow.

In that they made a mistake.

Blue Pete hurried back to the spot where he had spent the night, threw his park sack over his shoulders, and set out along the trail.

That it would not be a short trail he knew. The Indians, in spite of the feeling of anxiety they must have, would not dally, but after a day or so they would feel safer to linger. Mounted they would not expect a man on foot to give them trouble.

But to Blue Pete no trail was too long. Tireless on foot and swift unlike the ordinary cowboy who mounts a horse to cross the street, a habit almost necessary because of his high-heeled boots worn to prevent the feet slipping through the stirrups, now he should be thrown, he set out.

At first the trail was easy to follow, for the ground was soft, and the Indians had felt so secure that they had not thought it necessary to cover their route. The one thing that troubled the half-breed was that it seemed to show that the group was going a long distance, and hoped by that to be safe from an indignant owner.

And through the morning he kept on the trail, for the most part at a leisurely trot, but it carried him over the ground with amazing speed. By the hoof marks he could read fairly accurately the speed with which the Indians had gone, and he knew that though they had several hours' start he was more than holding his own. It was their pauses for rest and refreshment that enabled him to overtake them. In addition, they were unlikely to travel by night.

He figured that he would come up with them the next day, since he too must have some rest and he could not be certain of the trail in the dark. Patches of hard ground too kept appearing later in the day, and in some of them the Indians had altered their course enough to delay him. Once indeed they had turned directly toward the mountains before leaving a large area of shale that had been torn by the frost or some upheaval from a cliff and the delay in picking up the trail again made him more cautious.

That night he lay down where the morning sun would wake him early. The Indians, he knew, would start early, resting in the heat of the day and travelling in the cool of morning and evening.

One thing that encouraged him was the fact that the country was growing much rougher, and the progress of their ponies was slower.

With the first glint of the sun he was off. The way was more difficult but worse for horses than for him, and by mid forenoon he saw evidence that they were not far ahead.

His plan was to come on them while they were resting for the midday meal, and he slackened his pace a little. A rifle shot not far before him proved that his estimate of their position was correct. One of them was probably bringing in game for the noon meal and he crept forward more cautiously. He wished to make his appearance while they were unmounted and grouped together. It would place them more at his mercy should they prove hostile; he had no idea what his reception would be, but whatever it was, they had his broncho and he must retrieve it.

He could hear them now and he kept just far enough behind to run no risk of being seen, trusting to his ears to maintain a safe distance. His ears told him when they stopped to build a fire and when the ponies had been turned loose to feed.

Crawling cautiously nearer them he saw that the fire was built beside a stream. The Indians, except for one tending the fire, were squatted on the ground about it while their mounts grazed on a plot of grass on the other side of the stream. A glance told him that his own broncho was among them.

CHAPTER XIII

A BROTHER INDIAN

He had had lots of time to consider his plans. Much depended on the tribe to which the Indians belonged. His movements were more prudent and laudable than others. Several years, presented themselves, and it would be any addition he could foresee. Should the white appear likely to insist on keeping the Indians in the night and until dark and steal it back from them. Or he might suddenly walk in on them gun in hand and help himself.

Both plans he considered in favour of one that offered a good chance of success under any condition. It appeared to him more strategic because he must look ahead. Should he start off by making the Indians his enemies it would surely interfere with the job before him.

Accordingly he waited until the moon was under way from a low grouse had been shot and were cooked over the fire and when the Indians ate in silence Blue Pete suddenly appeared in the open not forty yards away and stalked directly and unhesitatingly upon on them.

He had taken the precaution to carry his rifle across the creek of his arms his right hand gripping the stock. In the front of his belt his gun was aggressively in sight. Plainly he was prepared for action should it be required of him.

He had expected to find within thirty yards the slight sound of his riding boots. Instead the ripple of his shadow before he was detected. Heard the Indians on the other side of the fire happened upon his late from the house he gripped his mouth against the fence tripped to the ground and a ground of astonishment and surprise brought every eye about to fix on him enquiringly.

They were no more surprised than he was when he noticed that the man whose back had been turned to him was Joe Blue because the Kiak-kia he had attacked and tied up in the outhouse near the Kiak-kia encampment at Medicine Hat.

A ripple of excitement flattered the night his scalp but he gave no sign of it. Steadily he advanced.

The Indian who had seen him first reacted for his rifle but the half breed had recovered from his surprise and his

own rifle and forward unconsciously. The Indian held his hand.

It was then Blue Pete saw that he need not have been concerned about his reception. The Indians were Wood Cree, a peaceful tribe, and more reconciled than their brothers to the rule of the white man. The Plain Cree were always warlike and unrelenting. Although his manner hardened a little, he even permitted a slight smile to appear on his face. It was not answered.

A dozen paces away the half breed stopped and addressed himself in the Cree language to one of the Indians who had turned to witness the scene.

I see my people have found my home. He has a habit of wandering. I am grateful a dog or has not been a nuisance and I thank you for taking care of him.

The half breed, accepting the friendly approach though a momentary frown revealed his disappointment. We found our fire in the forest. He was lost. I hope my friend does not think we sold him.

Blue Pete waved a dismissing hand. I should have held him more securely. But even then he wanders. I might not have found him. I was alone. I was very tired.

He waited. He must be invited to join the group, or it meant that they saw the sign in the snow and would sooner or later make it an invitation for him. As long as they would be unsuspicious they would be the protection he needed to visit the campgrounds through the bush.

He was anxious too about Joe Blue Goose. He had never seen the Indian before that evening when he had jumped up him and hog-tied him, as if he hoped that Joe had not seen him. But what was the Blackfoot doing away here so far from home? Could his presence have some connection with the whereabouts of North Wind? It did not require too much imagination to decide that it did.

Could it be that Little Pine had after all told her story revealing to her people that she had betrayed them, and had told where North Wind had gone, and how Joe Blue Goose came to warp him? Whatever the answer it appeared the height of wisdom to keep in touch with the Blackfoot. Another reason for wishing to make the tribe his friends.

For several uncomfortable moments no one spoke. The chief hesitated. The instinctive caution of his hand, and a guilty conscience made him uneasy. But at last, with a

wave of his hand he invited the new comer to join the group. It meant that at least they had not seen through his disguise, but had accepted him as an Indian like themselves. It was reassuring.

The half breed bent his head in token of thanks and stepped forward squatting before the fire among them. He managed, however to so place himself that none were behind him.

Mountain Stream says welcome murmured the chief.

My friend comes from where?

From far to the south replied Blue Pete where the prairie meets the mountains. I come alone travelling far.

My friend goes where?

The half breed shrugged his broad shoulders. Where game is good and fur plentiful. Where I come from the season promises to be bad. But I would not cross another's trap-line.

"Good." Mountain Stream granted his approval of the sentiment and waved an arm about. There is truth for all.

We hunt farther north near where a railway runs. It frightens the game a little but it is still plentiful. He looked the stranger over speculatively. My friend is a good hunter.

Blue Pete smiled modestly. If a straight eye and a quick hand mean a hunter I can do my share. Light or Dark shoots once, no more.

It would have sounded boastful had it not been for the speaker's modestly drooped eyes. It was merely a statement of fact answer to a plain question.

The chief threw his arm out with a graceful movement, the hand lingering to his belt to draw a revolver.

Mountain Stream too shoots only once.

An inquisitive bird that had eyed the group speculatively for some time from a nearby tree with many weak protesting squeaks fluttered nervously to the ground and hopped about. With a seemingly careless movement the chief aimed and fired and the bird sprang into the air and dropped back dead.

Blue Pete's expression of admiration was well done. He knew what was expected of him and he looked for some target that would prove him no braggart. The unexpected challenge placed him in a predicament. It was not that he doubted his ability to back his words with deeds but that if he made too surprising a demonstration of skill they might

be dangerously curious. With his reputation as a marksman about Medicine Hat it might arouse some suspicion in the mind of Joe Blue Goose. He must shoot well, but not too well.

He drew his gun and looked about. No birds were in sight, but there were a thousand targets on which to show his marksmanship. As he hesitated Mountain Stream pointed to the tree from which the bird had flown.

"Up there," he said, "is a broken twig. It hangs by the bark. If you do not cut the bark, I will."

Blue Pete took careful aim, though in his best shooting he never appeared to trouble about that, and the shot rang out. The twig jerked, and the edge of the bark sat open, but the twig held fast. It was a good shot, but it had not severed the bark.

Mountain Stream smiled confidently and fired, and an ejaculation of chagrin broke from him as the twig still hung.

To cover his discomfiture he grunted, "It is well. Light-in-Dark does not talk with big words. He is a brother." He extended his hand in the fashion of the whites. "He will come with us and trap with us." But when the grizzly or the mountain devil are near every bullet must be exactly on the mark. Mine was close," he added defensively, frowning about on his followers for any evidence of dissent. "Light-in-Dark's pony is there for him, and his saddle I have with mine. We will start."

CHAPTER XIV

A GOOD SHOT

ELATED with the turn of events, but careful not to show it, Blue Pete saw that, for the moment, he had attained his object. Accepted as a friend, only some needless act of his own would turn them against him. With the first thrill over, however, he was less easy about things. He was certain that Joe Blue Goose had no suspicion of his identity, though it was difficult to believe that anyone in the Medicine Hat district did not know him. He had never seen the Indian before the attack he made on him in the cutbank, probably due to the fact that Joe had spent most of his time elsewhere.

since the half breed's arrival in Canada from Montana two years before. But he realized his own inclination toward carelessness, even recklessness, and confidence in himself waned.

There were so many things that might in a thoughtless moment expose the part he played. His hatred of the Indians was the first and greatest danger—a feeling he had never tried to conceal. The second he had momentarily overcome in the contest of marksmanship with Mountain Stream. Should he shoot too well, as well as he was capable of their cunning, would be abused. The third danger was a visit to the Mounted Police. Any officer of the law would be curious about the stranger, and he could not hope to deceive him for long.

To say the role of a full-blooded Indian presented little difficulty. Not only had he succeeded in that several times before, but his Indian mother had left him all the outward marks of the race, and with his hair usually long the effect was as intended. The Indian manner and gait were easy to simulate, and he spoke several of their languages.

Though confident that his new friends accepted him for several days he took no chances. While riding he always kept well to the rear, and during the rest periods he sat with his back against a tree large enough to protect him from behind, and the members of the group he tried to keep before him, where he could keep an eye on them. There was nothing unusual in his desire to retire from the group to sleep, and to make more secure the isolated spot he chose he took pains to scatter about a dry twig that would warn him of the approach of anyone.

So successful was he that he began to fear that the very persistence of such precautions might arouse their suspicions.

On the third day an incident occurred that ingratiated him further in their good graces.

They had run short of meat, and three of the group had broken away to search for game, with instructions to meet at twilight at a selected spot where they would make camp for the night. Joe Blue Goose was one of the hunters.

During his absence Blue Goose felt more secure. It loosened his tongue, a fact of which Mountain Stream availed himself. The danger he ran in talking so much was he might hope only when he happened to mention an incident that had occurred in Medicine Hat. To cover his confusion he changed the subject

too abruptly and a slight frown showed for a moment on the chief's face.

With the thought of wiping the incident from Mountain Stream's mind he suggested that he try his own hand at hunting. He did not know the location of the place where they planned to meet, but he would have no trouble in picking up their trail. Mountain Stream hesitated to accept the offer but finally gave his consent. That something was in the chief's mind Blue Pete saw but he broke away from the group and started westward on a deep left in the hills.

He had advanced only half a mile when losing his mount into a thicket he dismounted and ran back through the trees to a point where he could watch the route the Indians were taking.

He was not surprised a few minutes later when Mountain Stream came riding along the route he himself had followed and the chief's keen Indian eyes were bent on the ground. Now and then he glanced from side to side. He was watching for something or someone and it was not hard to guess who the someone was. Close behind the chief came Joe Blue Cane. Either the Kachbet had returned after only a short hunt or he had never been far away.

The sight of the two Indians was a shock to the half-breed's assurance. It meant that the Indians had not accepted him as unreservedly as he had thought. Could it be that Joe Blue Cane had all the time known who he was?

If that were so the one safe course was to escape while he had the chance for the Indians would never forgive him, or had loved for doing the will of one of their own kind. With that in mind he rose from the hiding place where he lay intending to return to his house and flee.

At that moment the bushes immediately above the two Indians, as the rays he parted soon lit, and the head of a huge grizzly came into view. Neither Mountain Stream nor Joe Blue Cane had a suspicion of the danger so close to them and before Blue Pete could shout a warning the bear raced down the slope and leaped straight at them.

In his descent one huge paw sent Joe Blue Cane tumbling from the saddle as if he had been shot. The leap ended squarely on Mountain Stream who had had no time to shoot. Bear and man crashed to the ground.

Mountain Stream's hand flew to his knife but the bear's

paw hovered over his face and a paw swept against the arm that held the knife and panned it to the ground.

Blue Pete acted quickly. Even as the bear leaped his rifle lifted. Mountain Stream lay twisting helplessly, struggling to protect his face. The half breed pulled the trigger almost before he had time to get his eye along the sights.

With a rust of pain the bear reared upright, pawing at the air. And before it could drop back on the chest a second bullet went through its heart and it rolled limply away.

Mountain Stream sat up, staring vacantly about. The sudden attack and the fall had stunned him a little, but instinct had made him fight for his life. Joe Blue Goose too, was coming to his senses, and looking about for his rifle.

Blue Pete sauntered down the slope, his eye still on the bear, and his rifle ready. For even two bullets in time proved to be fatal, and seldom stop a grizzly in its tracks. He made for the huge brute and sent a bullet from his .45 into its brain. Still paying no attention to the two staring Indians, he rolled the bear over to examine the two bullet holes made by his rifle.

'Huh!' It was a grunt of disgust. 'Jes wot I thought! Had to hev the second one fer shore. Waa'n no vital spot to reach fer the first one the way the bear was. Had to make him git up so I cud reach his heart. Cef'n th a soft nose wou'nt do to kill em.'

He looked about. Joe Blue Goose sat staring at him with wide, startled eyes. A flutter of foreboding followed by a wave of disgust at his own carelessness, made the half breed return the stare with a foolish grin.

'Reckon yuh ain't fooled no longer, Joe,' he said, still in English.

The Indian's lips parted. 'Blue Pete!' he gasped.

Mountain Stream had risen to his feet. He understood no English, and appeared to be interested only in the bear.

'Wah! u gum to do bout it?' Blue Pete enquired of the Blackfoot.

Joe Blue Goose spread his hands. 'No business of mine, Blue Pete saved my life. That's all that matters. Joe Blue Goose's lips are sealed.'

At least he did not connect Blue Pete with the attack that day on the cutbank, and apart from the difference in their origin the Blackfoot could have no cause for unfriendliness. Whether the fact that Blue Pete came from Medicine Hat

would arouse some suspicion of the reason for his presence in the foothills depended on his connection with North Wind.

The half breed nodded his thanks, and jerked his head toward Mountain Stream. 'Bes stop talkin' English, he'll wonder. Tell him it's all right wat we're talkin'.'

He did not wait for the explanation, but himself addressed the chief in his own language. Rather spoiled the skin, Mountain Stream, but I had to hit heavy where I could. I know these grizzlies. I was once guide to a party of Englishmen in the foothills. We ran into two grizzlies. One of them four of us shot together. shot at I mean. One bullet got it right in the heart, but it kept on coming. I had to knock it out with a bullet in the head, and get in two more shots before it fell. The Englishmen had a lot to say. I said some of it just now to Joe Blue Goose.'

The chief granted, he suspected nothing. 'Light-in-Dark saved two lives. Now Light in Dark is a full brother.' He placed both hands on Blue Pete's shoulders and grunted twice, murmuring a few unintelligible words. He turned to the bear. 'Meat enough for a week now. Light-in-Dark is a great hunter. The skin is his. It will keep him warm when winter comes.'

The bronchos of the two Indians had raced madly away up the ravine, for nothing so terrifies them as a bear. Blue Pete ran to his own broncho, and quickly had them rounded up and back to their owners.

By the time he returned the bear was skinned and the choicest cuts were removed from the carcass.

That night, for the first time, a pipe was passed from hand to hand, Blue Pete taking the first puff after Mountain Stream. For the time being he was safe.

CHAPTER XV

AMBUSHED

BLUE PETE had been careful to make no direct enquiries as to where they were going, but since cold weather was approaching he felt certain their destination was the home camp. They had probably been south visiting other camps, or investigating other hunting grounds. They

carried some far, but there was too little of it, and the summer skins were lightly furred. It meant that they had not been spending their time hunting.

As an accepted member of the tribe, he would be expected to hunt with them, and share their catch. Where their home camp was, he knew made no difference, as yet, since he had no idea where he would encounter his hunt for North Wind. The most encouraging thing about it was the presence of Joe Blue to show Joe Blue Pete could not tell himself of the thought, and the hope, that the Blackfoot was on his way, either to help or to warn the man he was after.

It pleased well Joe that, soon accepted by Mountain Stream, he might move around the night the various Indian encampments without question. He knew that his presence with the rifle, now far, at least, as it had saved the chief's life, would spread quickly through the foothills.

What to do Joe Blue knew. However, during the days that followed, he was less confident of the Blackfoot's purpose. Joe seemed concerned about nothing, but was content to go along and live as a member of Mountain Stream's tribe. Where or how he had joined the tribe Blue Pete never knew, but there was no question of his standing with Mountain Stream and his followers.

During the succeeding days they passed three Indian encampments, and stopped at each for a short visit, sleeping at one of them. It enabled the half-breed to satisfy himself that North Wind was not there. At the same time, if familiarized him with the layout and membership of the camps, and introduced him as a friend.

They reached the fourth encampment. They had come north so far that he knew they could not be far from the railway that cut through the mountains from Edmonton. The landscape, as they moved nearer the railway, showed the effects of a closer association with civilization. More comforts were apparent, and a more sophisticated manner and method of living.

The fourth camp was best of all. It had been built with an eye to comfort in the cold winters of the northern foothills. The cabins were well built and carefully spaced between the logs. It was an Indian job Joe Blue Pete had never encountered before, and it interested him. The chief's cabin stood apart in the centre of the circle of huts, the finest and largest of all. The chief himself, a fine figure of a man, bore himself

with a dignity befitting his rank. In his welcome to the visitors he showed to best effect, and Blue Pete's frank admiration of everything he saw plainly pleased him.

The half-breed wandered aimlessly about the circle of cabins forgetting his purpose. He longed to see inside but, except for fleeting glimpses, that was denied him. The Indians, too, were a line but a surprising discovery, since it was usual for them to be soft and lax, in direct proportion to their proximity to the white man's comforts and manner of living.

During his stroll almost at the last cabin he was brought swiftly back to his duty by the narrow opening of a door that closed more swiftly than it opened. Always sensitive to movements like that he restrained his curiosity and continued his walk. As he reached the other side of the circle where he could look without arousing suspicion, he was in time to see an Indian disappear around the cabin and duck out of sight into the woods beyond.

A tingle of excitement raced through him and he concentrated on the glimpse he had caught. There was something familiar about the fellow but for a time he could not imagine who it was.

It came to him suddenly, so suddenly that he halted and faced squarely toward the spot where the Indian had disappeared. It was the bank robber who had shot at him in Red Deer!

For a moment his inclination was to race after him. But he managed to restrain himself. After all the fellow was no concern of his. In shooting, the other three he himself had done more than could be expected of him, and now he had another job, of greater importance to him, to do there in the foothills. It was only by accident that he had become involved in the Red Deer affair, an accident that had left no comfortable measures, and might prove dangerous for him in the end and he wanted to forget it. He had no special feeling against the dead Indians though he felt no friendliness toward the one who had escaped, for he had fired a shot that might have spoiled everything.

Better forget it, especially as he himself was probably sought now by the Mounted Police as one of the robbers.

The incident, however, clung to him as he moved about. The furtive way the Indian had acted was threatening. Something about it seemed to imply an enemy and an enemy

loose in the foothills might make trouble for him—no, rather for the job he was trying to do.

There was, however, nothing to be done about it and he rejoined his companions, and rode out of the camp in the early afternoon. A single common-sense precaution he took, more by instinct than by plan—he was careful to ride in the heart of the group.

Every precaution, however, came near to failing him. They had ridden only a few minutes when, from a thicket of trees on a hill-top, a rifle-shot rang out and a bullet whistled close to his head, cutting through the sleeve of the Indian beyond him.

In five seconds the group had scattered without a word, dashing into the trees and seeking cover. Blue Pete clung to Mountain Stream. It was not that he felt safer there, but he wished to make sure that the chief was in no way concerned in the ambush. They regarded each other with startled eyes.

"What does it mean?" Mountain Stream was plainly even more surprised and upset than was the half-breed.

Blue Pete would have preferred to pass the incident off as some sort of accident since he wanted no part of the Red Deer story to be known, so far as it concerned him, but that was impossible.

"Was he shooting at you?" he asked.

Mountain Stream peered from the thicket in which they had taken shelter. "It was a bad shot if it was at me." He pointed. "It came from up there. Come with me, we will find out."

For a couple of hundred yards Mountain Stream spurred his mount to the north, then cut back up the slope keeping well within the trees. For a time Blue Pete followed. He was undecided how to act. He knew, only too well, who had fired the shot and at whom it was aimed, but it might defeat his whole purpose for the bank-robber to be captured and forced to tell the story.

Accordingly, at the first opportunity he lingered behind. He could hear Mountain Stream still pushing up the slope at top speed, his idea evidently being to cut in behind the thicket from which the shot had come.

Blue Pete turned and, keeping close to the foot of the slope where its curving rise protected him, he rode southward. He was curious, he wished to be sure. And he was

getting more and more angry. He saw that through this time the attempt on his life had failed unless something drastic was done about it the attempt must be repeated until it succeeded. Whatever was done however must be strictly between himself and the would be assassin.

He figured that the Indians would work somewhat more deeply into the fastnesses of the forest until escape was assured but there was the possibility that he might cut back to the south and re-enter the camp from which he had fled.

With that in mind he rode as fast as he could and after a few minutes shifted his direction to the west. All the time he listened for any betraying sound.

He remembered then that the hunter dog had left camp without a sound so that he could not go far. It did give him the advantage however of being able to move about without making a sound while his pursuers might be located by the tramp of their horses' hoofs.

Shortly after leaving direction the half breed slowed down. He wanted to listen to avoid another ambush. The crackle of a twig not far away warned him that someone was near so he threw himself from the horse and advanced on foot. Swiftly but cautiously he moved stopping every few yards to listen.

Time and again he heard someone moving through the trees before him and he kept on. Evidently the Indian had come to the conclusion that he was well away from pursuit but he seemed to be making his way steadily west the encouragement and was anxious of the noise he made.

Suddenly a wave of anger and hatred swept over the half breed. This was the man who had shot at him in Red Deer the man who had taken a gun and shot at him in an ambush while he was surrounded by friends. A larger size man who must be settled with and without delay. Some time they would have to come face to face and fight it out. Better to have it over now and save himself trouble in the task he had to carry through. Even the memory of the three Indians he had been killed about he held against the man now where ahead of him.

With his anger he grew careless. Suddenly he realized that for several minutes he had heard nothing. Had the Indian escaped or had he become aware that he was followed and was waiting to maul his pursuer?

Feeling the latter the half breed turned to the east and

when he fancied himself safe started to run. He planned to cut off the Indian's retreat to the camp, should he attempt it and if an ambush was in mind he could turn back and surprise him.

It took only a few minutes to convince himself that the fellow had not made for the camp, and he started back, moving with caution, and listening for any revealing sound. He heard nothing. It worried him and he became impatient. It seemed to him that the only way he might find the Indian was to expose himself. It was dangerous, but necessary.

Deliberately he stepped on a twig, and the crackle rang through the trees. Nothing else happened. He advanced a few more steps, and again snapped a twig.

He had almost come to the conclusion that during his race toward the camp the Indian had fled when something happened. The warning sense that had served him so often came suddenly to life with the double warning that it had been ringing for attention for some time. Now it was too late.

He flattened against a tree and turned his eyes to the point from which the warning had come. Not a dozen paces away the Indian stood glowering at him, rifle pointing straight at his breast!

CHAPTER XVI

CAPTURED

A SHEEPISH grin spread over Blue Pete's face. Uppermost in his mind was not fear but chagrin and shame. He had made another mistake, had let his impatience crowd out ordinary caution. And he had not credited the Indian with the cunning of his race. He had stalked him as he would a white man, who trusted to intelligence rather than to instinct. Perhaps he had been made more careless by the fact that the bullet fired at him from such a close range had missed its mark. Such a miss aroused only contempt.

Now, staring into the little round hole of a steady held rifle, he realized how thoughtless he had been—what a fix he had got himself into.

He was conscious of no fear, no real sense of helplessness, but, now, whatever he did was almost certain to expose their relationship to Mountain Stream and his men.

The Indian sneered. "You walked into it," he said in Cree. "You must be inexperienced."

Blue Pete grunted. He saw that his disguise had not been penetrated. "You shot at my chief," he growled. "You are not a Wood Cree."

The other laughed nastily and spat. "Neither are you. I asked about you. I am not a Wood Cree, I hate them, I spit at them. He spat again. "I can say it now, because you won't be alive to tell them."

It struck into the half breed something of the seriousness of the situation: the Indian would have no compunctions about shooting him in cold blood and there were many adequate explanations to make should it be discovered.

"Whatever you do to me," he said, "my friends will find you and kill you. The camp you were in will learn of it and help. Every Cree in the foothills will search for you."

The threat had no effect. "Many are looking for me now—more dangerous than Indians. You must know that. You shot at me in Red Deer. I missed you that time. I will not miss this time."

"You've missed me twice already," jeered Blue Pete, now blindly angry. "An Indian who can shoot so better should wear a squaw's dress."

The Indian snarled. "Your broncho reared just as I fired." He advanced a couple of steps, his face contorted with anger. "What happened to my friends in Red Deer?"

Blue Pete shrugged. "You did not see? You have not heard?"

"I have heard they were shot. Who did it?"

"You should have waited, and not run, like the coward you are. There was much shooting." The half breed hesitated whether to tell of their fate.

"They had the money. You rode between them and me."

"Yes," said Blue Pete. "And I shot them—one—two—three—just like that. It was good practice."

The Indian's teeth bared. "I thought it might be you. I'm glad now, that I missed you: there are other ways for you to die, ways that will pay for what you have done. I know several ways that will avenge them and satisfy me."

The half breed felt better. He saw that the Indian was so angry that his hands shook. "You daren't shoot me here," he jeered. "A shot would bring the whole tribe about us."

My chief is back there now to cut you off from the mountains. The tribe is scattered, looking for you."

He had been standing with raised hands. Now he commenced to lower them.

The Indian saw it and started. "Keep them up! I take no chances. It is to make me shoot you here I can get away. But the threat had frightened him. Turn and walk that way."

Blue Pete turned. With his back to the Indian, he was more helpless, but it gave him time to plan, and left him some control of the direction they took. He knew with a fair amount of accuracy where the chief would be and almost unexpectably he edged in that direction.

He thought that he might make sufficient noise as they went to warn any of the other Indians within hearing, there were dead logs and leaves everywhere, and he went out of his way to crush them. He even succeeded in dislodging a stone on a slope, and the rattle of it carried through the forest. That the Indian at his back was too intent on his capture to notice promised well. With no carelessness he surely would find some means of dealing later, even if no one intervened.

When they had me, he said over his shoulder, they'll know who shot me. I've told them about you. It will be worse for you if they think it was the chief you shot at. It will be the high every camp. You will be without friends.

Now, halting, snapped the Indian, and more more quickly. I know how you can get about, with less noise.

I'll make certain they never find you. I'll leave you where the grizzlies and the mountain devils will finish you.

He saw his plan failing, and Blue Pete tried another. He appeared to give up hope. His shoulders drooped, his head hung, his feet dragged.

They reached an open space. Before them rose a steep hill, with only scattered trees over it. Blue Pete raised his eyes. On the open height over their heads stood Mountain Stream, staring down on them.

The half breed pointed. Look.

His capote turned started even upward. On the instant Blue Pete leaped behind a tree, at the same time reaching for his gun. The Indian almost as swiftly ducked to cover and ran, dodging from tree to tree.

He made a more too difficult target, but the half breed did not shoot. Something too swift for reasoning held his hand.

There would be no satisfaction in bringing down such an enemy from behind: their enmity was much too bitter now to be settled so simply.

Mountain Stream shouted, and started down the hill. Blue Pete stepped into the open, grinning. The chief stopped before him, running a scowling eye over him.

"Light n-Dark was careless," he growled scornfully. "There is more to being a good hunter than a good aim."

Blue Pete nodded. "Yes, there is cunning; as well."

"Light n-Dark knows the words. Does he know their meaning?"

"A wide meaning, indeed," returned the half-breed. "I was cunning. I led his enemy to Mountain Stream. It was not my place to shoot one who had shot at the chief, that was for Mountain Stream himself."

The implied rebuke had its effect. The chief nodded. "I did not understand. I saw two coming from the trees. When I recognized you it was too late. I am sorry."

Blue Pete pursed his lips indifferently. "It means nothing to me."

Later he was to discover how thoughtlessly he spoke.

Mountain Stream's eyes flashed. "We will follow him. He will be found in some encampment. Would you know him again?"

The half-breed's head shook. "He was in the shadow back there when he made me turn, and I led him to you. He will not be found now. He is not a Wood Cree. He must have been following you."

They made their way to the encampment they had left a few hours before, and Mountain Stream spoke of the ambush. There was no reason to suspect the guest who had done it.

On their way back to join the rest of the tribe Mountain Stream asked:

How was it that he captured you, Light n-Dark?"

Blue Pete was prepared. He smiled easily. "When the coyote captures the wolf it is because the wolf has planned it. It is a plan that bodes ill for the coyote. But the coyote is too puffed with pride to foresee the danger."

It was a language Mountain Stream understood. "We will find him some time together," he said.

Blue Pete was not interested. When the Indian was found he wanted to be alone with him.

CHAPTER XVII

ATTEMPTED MURDER

THE RE had been two weeks of fine weather. That was to be expected after the first snowstorm. Blue Pete had waited in a month—he would expect to in the West—and it seemed to offer a gift just come for what he had to do. He was satisfied, therefore, when the night suddenly became much colder, and a fog was in the air that warned of snow.

It struck him then that he knew little of the weather conditions so far north, and so near the mountains. For a time he tried to say for himself that the fog in the air was nothing but the influence of the glaciers that seemed to near without weather, but when it persisted and increased, he wondered if the time spent with Mountain Stream and his men was not useless extended. Again he could have swept down ground, visited more camps, spread his search over more territory. The war things were going against him with their uncertainty, their failure to meet the night's run.

These doubts he tried to satisfy by the fact of the Blue Hawk's presence. The Blackfoot had kept his word in bringing Blue Pete's children, and he was unquestionably a friend. As yet. At the same time the half-breed often found fur even better of his negotiations, as they were not quite satisfied.

No flight as the Red Hawk's seemed to be made about the necessity of avoiding the Mountain Police, and few questions were asked of him. In the Blue Hawk's case the explanation given was the same as for men a month or more hunting grounds, but on the Blackfoot's side it had been freely accepted in Mountain Stream. At the same time the Blue Hawk must have remembered that the safe haven was given to the half-breed hunters where he was at home—the Canyon House and the Mountain Blackbirds. And both of these were more or nearer than where he was now.

That was what Blue Pete suggested that he could detect tonight going to the Blackfoot camp, and several times he was seen in his conference with Mountain Stream. Nothing definite, however, seemed to establish such a doubt of its existence, and still it seemed wise that a way be found to drop it. He managed to get Joe apart.

"Joe Blue Goose has been a good friend," he said in the Blackfoot language.

The Indian grunted. It meant nothing in particular.

"I will go," Blue Pete offered, "if I am not wanted. I do not wish to make my friend uncomfortable."

"Why should I be uncomfortable?" asked the Indian.

"I do not wish to bring my friends under the suspicion of the Mounted Police."

It was enough. Joe Blue Goose's brows raised. "They are after you again. You ran away."

Blue Pete appeared to hesitate. "My friend does not wish me to tell him too much; it might not be safe if the Mounted Police came. Life was dull about Medicine Hat. It was duller about the 5 Bar Y. I never could stand dullness. And so I came away. Leave it at that. I did not expect to find such friends where the Mounted Police would not be apt to look for me."

Every Indian in the foothills had long ago heard of the bank-robbery in Red Deer, and Joe Blue Goose's eyes widened with surprise and admiration.

"You were lucky," he said, accepting the connection without question, for he knew one had escaped.

"I trust my friend," said Blue Pete, and closed his lips tightly.

"Joe Blue Goose's lips are more tightly sealed than ever," promised the Blackfoot. "I have wondered. Blue Pete may. The half breed's hand raised warningly. "Light-in-Dark may trust me. It is as if he had never spoken. as if he was always Light-in-Dark. I have spoken."

So far so good. Blue Pete knew that now, unless something unfortunate happened, he was safe, so far as Joe Blue Goose was concerned. To almost any extent an Indian will protect another from the laws of the white man. Both felt better for the interview.

That they were nearing the home encampment Blue Pete sensed from the increasing slowness of their advance. The Indians appeared in no hurry, and as they moved along they tested more thoroughly the winter's prospect for fur. Each day the camps were more extended, while the braves rode deeper into the mountains and hunted. After a night of howling protest from timber wolves Mountain Stream ordered a day's delay while they gave chase to the animals,

for wolf skins were valuable and the winter skins were almost complete. Their furs were more plentiful and the offer of meat for the home camp kept the Indians busy for much of the day.

It was during one of these long trunts that a real tragedy occurred. Joe Blue Pete introduced a mystery whose explanation he did not have for several months.

Mountain streams always eager to justify his rank had penetrated more deeply into the heights the west. He knew the best way out for the home camp was not far away and he knew of a trail used by mountain goats in their nightly feeding on the lower slopes. It was a long ride and he set off long before daylight giving orders for the others to follow through the nearby valleys and woods.

Not long afterwards Blue Pete started away. He had no definite goal in mind but he too struck westward. The district of course was new to him but he had no fear of losing himself. His inclination was always to turn his back on the mountains but his work was to be there until he found North West and he made up his mind to adjust himself to the cold heights.

The ravine he followed at first presently settled into a deep cañon. A rushing glacier stream lined the bottom but there was sufficient foothold at the sides for his branches to get through and by keeping a watch on the cliffs on either side he judged that presently the canyon would widen and flat.

After a time however the roaring rush of the water irritated him it interfered with his hearing and so that he depended. With every other sound drowned he felt insecure, exposed and after waiting for some time the feeling of helplessness it gave him he found a slope not too steep for the branch and climbed to a higher level.

Throughout the morning nothing worth a cartridge offered. But he thought little of game he had other problems. Though he felt reasonably safe in Joe Blue Turner's hands he had little confidence in his own ability to continue to play the role he had assumed. Playing Indian alarmed him there was in his mind something disturbing about it. And he knew his tendency to break down and express his feelings. He had felt the past growing more left all day by day partly because nothing had yet been explained. In reality he need not have worried except for his own

impatience. There were many Indians no darker of skin than he, and he had the right facial structure and hair. A little white blood had at some time entered the veins of many Indians, a relic of the days when white women were few.

Another cause for worry was the approach of winter. Not that frost and snow appalled him, but he knew that they would handicap him in his search. He had faced another September snowstorm at the last full moon to the south, and it had not left a pleasant memory.

He longed to get away before winter set in, and the thought made his homework, homework for Mota, for the 300 Yukon range, little the interesting visits to Medicine Hat, for Sergeant Maher, and Inspector Barker. Never before had he felt so out of the world, even during the months he had spent as an outlaw in the Blacklands. The winter solitude of the mountains lay dead but in unexpected mountain heights that stood so still and so differently over him. It worried him into thinking that never before had weather frightened him. Now he had a premonition that the winter would exact a heavy toll of him.

Early in the afternoon it came to him that it would be unwise to return to camp empty-handed; it would be out of line with the reputation he had acquired and would perhaps arouse some suspicion. Accordingly he commenced seriously to look about for game.

To keep out of the way of the other Indians until he had something to show for his wandering, he continued westward, slowly toward a towering peak with a long glacier pointing directly at him. Since ~~no game came~~ in sight he increased his pace, listening and waiting. A number of times he came on bear tracks but not until mid-afternoon did a fresh one appear, and he set out along it. The grizzlies would be ready to hibernate; they must be taken now or they were lost.

For more than an hour he followed the trail. Suddenly the trees parted and he found himself in a wide open space that extended to a narrow bank of forest at the foot of a long open slope. The broad light glazing his face almost startled him, and he drew in ~~breath~~ looking about with some curiosity. The glacier before him appeared almost near enough to touch but he knew it was still many miles away.

* Blue Peter, Rebel.

* Blue Peter, Outlaw.

and much higher. [With a shiver he turned his mount back into the trees.

As he did so a rifle shot rang out from somewhere near the open slope. He knew Mountain Stream had gone in that direction, and a dozen Indians might be hunting, but the sound startled him. He sensed that it was not a hunter's shot and the blood raced through his veins.

From the echoless sound he gathered, too, that the shot was not fired among the trees. And toward the slope he had seen no sign of game.

With a jab of his heels he sent the broncho racing more deeply into the trees, and dismounted. Hurrying back to the edge of the clear space, he scanned the mountain-side.

He saw now what he had missed before or what had been invisible—a dark spot midway up the slope. As he watched, it moved, and sank almost out of sight.

He had to know more, and he got his broncho and raced forward keeping to the trees as much as possible. Presently even that cover ended.

He could see more clearly now. The dark spot was there still, a mere line against the slope. It was plainly a man lying down.

He spurred ahead.

As he did so an Indian rose into view above the tops of the band of trees that lined the foot of the slope. Climbing rapidly, he slunk from rock to rock, evidently seeking cover as he went.

The man lying higher up did not move.

Feeling that he would not be in time to prevent some sort of tragedy, Blue Pete, nevertheless, tore forward. He had still almost a mile to go. But the climbing Indian might still be intercepted before he could return to the cover of the forest.

"Gor-swattle Gor-swattle" he growled. "Ef on'y I had Whiskers!"

But the pinto would have been of little help, and he knew it.

The general idea of the scene was apparent: the lower Indian was creeping on the one higher up. And it came to the half-breed that the stillness of that spot of dark on the slope was accounted for by the shot he had heard.

Helpless but frantically eager to do something, Blue Pete opened his mouth with the hopeless thought of making

himself heard of wearing the cunning Indian off when a second Indian appeared on the northern edge of the slope. He was running, he was taking cover as he went. He dropped behind a rock, and a rifle showed over the top.

A shot rang out and a slight cloud of dust kicked into the air close to the feet of the Indian who had been making his way up the mountain side.

Instantly the latter turned and plunged down the slope bounding along like a mountain goat to disappear into the trees.

The other Indian rose and watched the flight, not offering to shoot again. Then he commenced to hunt. He went slowly, hesitatingly. Presently he stopped and looked about. The half breed stood in the open, waiting with parted lips, puzzled and uncertain. The Indian saw him and turned and ran. There was consultation about him there.

Blue Pete was bewildered. He knew only that the latest Indian had frightened off the other, and had probably prevented the happening of a tragedy expressed in the still figure just visible on the slope. But why had he run?

There was much to be explained, and he made swift work of it. In a few minutes he reached the forest lining the foot of the slope, and there he hesitated. Thinking only of the man lying far above him, he pushed the saplings back and commenced to climb. He was brought back to the folly of it by a bullet, going into a rock beside his shoulder, and for a moment he hesitated, behind it.

But he could not remain there. He had an idea that the man above him needed help, and quickly, if he were not already dead, and so he took the risk and went on.

A second shot rang out sharply. But he knew it was not at him. Had the Indian he had seen last come to his protection, as he had to that of the man above?

Seeking what answer there he hunted rapidly. But he was short of the time exposed, and by the fact that there were no more shots he decided that he was safe.

At last scrambling over a low rock, he reached his goal. An Indian lay in a shallow depression. It was Mountain Stream. And in the chief's hand was a revolver pointing steadily. A cynical gleaming hint to the chief's face made the revolver doubly dangerous.

CHAPTER XVIII

PRISONER

"**H**UH I thought you I walk into it. Mountain Stream I tooth hated. You thought you I done for me. You sit here stopped because I was playing possum. It was all I could do to keep in this position. Your best shot didn't quite finish me so you sent me to complete the job. I knew you would. Well it's all right as far as doing a pleasant job. I always suspected you. But you're reliable."

A burst of pain halted his words, however, and the gun wavered a little, but the aim remained good and threatening.

It seemed a long time, as he lay up, and put another bullet in me. There it be in me to see. Your best shot's were good, they didn't even come near me enough for me to beat the bullets. You thought you were smart, faster than I am, that someone would suspect you after shooting four gunmen. It was very clever. But others are smarter. You thought.

A square of pain showed for him for a moment, and his teeth gritted together against it.

Blue Pete stood staring at him, lips parted. He did not understand that the wound he saw the chest had suffered and how much of his mind. A wide red stain on the neck beneath him showed that he had lost much blood, and the square of pain seemed to grow for the agony within. He looked back pain with amazing silence. Truly he might stand at any moment, and the hand that held the gun, while it shook a little, would keep the bullet in its target.

The continued shock showed in slow bewilderment. A momentary thought came to him that he would have to shoot to save himself, but he could not bring himself to that.

"You think I was a good one," he said. "I was miles away when the best shot was hurt. I heard it, and saw you lying here, though I had no idea it was you. Then I saw someone climbing up to you, and I knew what he planned to do. I came then as fast as I could. But I could not have been in time. Someone else came out from the trees on this side and frightened the shot with a shot. That was why one of the shots did not come near you. The next one was fired at me while I was climbing to you, and then the last one scared him away again. I suppose for there came no more."

Mountain Stream's forehead wrinkled with the strain of dwelling. "How ~~many~~ shots? Yes, it might. He leaned himself against conviction. "Someone drove you back, perhaps, at first. Then you came again when it seemed safe."

"If I had tried to murder you," Blue Pete began. Then he leaped forward. A film had gathered over Mountain Stream's eyes, and the gun dropped from his hand as he sank limply back against the rock.

Blue Pete bent over him, feeling for his pulse. It still beat strongly, and he seized the chest under the shoulders and propped him against a rock. He bound the wound in his back. It had stopped bleeding, and there was nothing he could do there. Feeling the man's chest with both hands his shoulder, he started again for the mountain side.

He went gently and fast, forgetting the easy target he offered. Forgetting the two Indians who had intentionally come and gone, and lost in order the other one protecting a wounded man. His one thought was to get himself back to his men for attention; they would know what to do.

He reached the lower bar and with some difficulty eased the chest across the animal's shoulders. Then, looking into the saddle, he lifted the unconscious man across his thighs and set out for the camp.

He had not gone far when Joe Blue found him from the trees and joined him. Blue Pete told the story so far as he knew it. He said things I don't say, he protested.

The Blackfoot squinted and it is queer for a few moments.

Then what will happen to you when he wakes. I cannot help you. I know ~~now~~ what you have told me, what you told him. I suppose, and you must have paid.

But when I tug him upwards, that I prove I didn't want to kill him, and Blue Pete in English.

The Blackfoot's head shook. "He may die. They may think you know he cannot recover. You are a stranger. They know nothing about you, and they have died in silence. We dare not tell them who you are." It is always suspect.

It struck home. "I could hand him over to you, Joe, anywhere. The threat was not to himself, but to his job."

Then they would know you did it, was not Joe Blue Goner, and they would never rest till they killed you.

He saw then that the danger was not so much what they would do to him if they had him, but that they would always

be in his way if he can—impeding him at every turn. "I'm gone with yuh, he decided. 'I ain't no good runnin' away from nothin'. I jes' got rambunk-shus when I'm crowded. I break out an' do things. Yuh shud know that.' He looked down at theanimate body before him. He ain't gon' to die, not Mountain Stream ain't. I gotta show him I didn' do it."

Joe Blue Goose was thinking. "The other Indians—who were they?"

Blue Pete scratched his head thoughtfully. "Gor-wuzzle, I was fergittin'. I do know a thing 'bout em. Funny, that, too."

"The one who fired at Mountain Stream—I understand why he ran. But the other?"

Blue Pete could only shake his head. "Has Mountain Stream got an enemy like that? Ain't the Indians here most Wood Crees? Wot's it mean?"

"I do not know. I came only two days before you."

Blue Pete's eyes focused on him with sudden interest. "Then you're a stranger here jes' like I am. Why they so friendly with yuh?"

The Blackfoot made no reply. his mind was on other things. "The second In-yan—you say he ran too, when he saw you?"

"Shore did—an' some runner. But he come round later an' skinned off the last one ag'in when he shot at me."

A suggestion of a smile flitted across the Blackfoot's face. The half-breed saw it and wondered what it meant.

Several of the Indians had returned to the camp before them. They saw the pair of runners coming and hurried to meet them exclaiming at sight of the still unconscious chief. They eased him to the ground. Blue Pete stood by, eager to help if there was anything he could do.

Examination revealed the fact that the bullet had entered the wounded man's shoulder—a soft-nosed bullet that had torn a nasty hole. But the fact that Mountain Stream still breathed with reassuring regularity proved that no vital part had been struck.

The moment the wound was found three of the braves hurried off into the forest. In a few minutes they returned with their hands full of small pungent leaves. These they applied to the wound in the upper chest and back, and the chief's arm was bound tightly to his side. The bleeding had long since ceased, but so much blood had been lost that it was hours before the chief returned to consciousness.

His eyes opened on Blue Pete bent side the camp fire and for several moments they stared blankly into the half-breed's face. Then they moved slowly off to the others' group about him.

Hub! It was a weak grunt, and the chief closed his eyes. His hands began to tremor in an effort to recall what had happened.

Presently his eyes opened once more, and he looked to one of his men. "I'm glad you got him," he murmured nodding toward Blue Pete.

The Indians stared at one another. One said: "He brought you in. He found you wounded, lying on the mountain side."

"You must have got there in time to take him by surprise. It may be that we take him away, and see that he does not escape."

Joe Blue (some) beckoned them apart and tried to explain. "You can see Light-in-Dark could not have done this. I met him only a few minutes' ride from here. He had Mountain Stream set on the saddle as you saw him. He has carried him on his back down the mountain side, and had brought him on his horse the rest of the way. All the time he was a danger from the one who shot Mountain Stream. Mountain Stream does not understand. All he saw was Light-in-Dark, him who up to rescue him, he did not see who shot him. It is not reasonable to think Light-in-Dark could have done this. Mountain Stream is wrong. When he is stronger he will understand."

They listened, but plainly without conviction. At the end one said: "Mountain Stream has given his orders. Light-in-Dark must stay, and we know."

The Blackfoot saw that for the time being it was useless to try to reason with them. He will not try to escape. He is willing to wait until he is proven not to be back-baited.

He went to Blue Pete, who stood awaiting their decision. "They must obey the orders of their chief. But I fear they may be too stupid to make sure you do not escape. There is nothing more I can do."

An angry light flashed in the half-breed's face, and was gone. He was not afraid. He knew that if the worst came to the worst, he would find some means of escape. And he needed the friendship of these people. To escape now would make every Indian in the foothills his enemy. He would be a hunted man, with everything and everyone blocking his every move.

"W'en Mountain Stream gits outa it he'll see I cudn' 'a' did it. Ted 'em I won't try to git away, I cud 'a' did that long ago ef I d wanted to. I cud 'a' let Mountain Stream whar he was an' he d 'a' died fer shure 'fore they'd 'a' found him. No use tellin' 'em that now, so do waste yer breath."

The Indians were evidently uneasy about it. They had come to like and respect the half-breed, and they knew that they were in his debt. They saw, too, that the story he told was reasonable. But the chief's orders must be obeyed. They retired to talk it over.

It was finally agreed that Blue Pete should hand over his guns and his knife, and that until they reached the home camp he should ride and sleep between two braves. But for the present they did not bind him.

CHAPTER XIX

A FRIEND IN NEED

THAT night he slept with two pair of Indians on either side, while two more kept watch beside the camp fire. He slept well, however, with the thought that on the morrow the chief would see how reasonable he was.

But the following day there was no sign of relenting, and with their prisoner well guarded, they set out on the final stretch to the home camp. The expression on Joe Blue Goose's face proved that nothing had occurred to improve the situation.

Blue Pete commenced to worry. He felt certain that, as yet, they planned no physical harm to him, but he would have to abide their pleasure, and he saw that proof of his innocence would be difficult to find. Only two Indians could supply that proof. One would be certain to keep out of his way, while the other had exhibited unmistakable signs of wishing the same thing. Even were he free to search for them, he would not know where to go, nor would he recognize them if he came on them.

Mountain Stream insisted on riding his own pony, sitting straight and steady in the saddle, but it was clear that he was in pain. The evidence of suffering had its effect on his followers, and Blue Pete found himself left coldly alone, except for the silent guards.

In the early evening they now held the house against them. A rider had gone ahead and the entire army was ordered to surround them. It did nothing to reassure the half-breed that these warriors were intentioned hostile though they made no threatening move.

The arrangement of the house proved him. Inside others he had seen other houses to the north and even those they had passed during the last few days the beds were arranged in a regular fashion, one about an open space in which a small larger altar had been erected for the gods. Tables and other preserved throughout, bespeaking a greater wealth within the house. There were few beds for an Indian village and those in evidence were better ones, fur and furs. Against the wall the usual litter of beaver and tree pieces and garbage and rusted stoves. Even the refuse here appeared to be arranged as well as to a general plan.

Blue Peter's mind was more than the present situation but Indians. It was a scene of indignation and confusion and he knew he must be quick that night to escape.

The beds were high, the beds the higher, were made up and covered by the great pieces of skin the skins of moose and the bear and skins of caribou. The beds of the village were were arranged opposite the openings between those of the inner circle and an outer circle. Between the inner circle and the outer circle a gravelled walk had been laid down about the open space with four paths at right angles leading to the circle's door.

An unusual Indian arrangement indeed and the tribe was undoubtedly in its present confusion.

For the time being at least it meant nothing to him in making the arrangements himself to be made or not.

Without so much as a glance at his people, he had rode through them and was raised from the saddle before his own door. Blue Peter was not here to a place in the inner circle and two Indians were set on guard at the door.

He had turned about about the room in which he found him self. It was a room of a single room with two small openings in the walls, several windows. Frames made of heavy stone were propped against the walls beneath the openings evidently intended to cover them to keep out the cold and storms. The openings were much too small to offer any chance of escape that way.

That did not trouble him.

What did trouble him was that for the next three days he saw nothing of Joe Blue Goose. He was allowed outside the hut, but was not permitted to wander beyond the inner circle of huts, and always the two Indian guards remained at his side. It was plain that Mountain Stream, as yet, saw no reason to relent. The one hope of release was the Blackfoot, and he appeared to have left the camp.

He had not time to make preparations, but on the third day he could remain silent no longer. His guards, however, would tell him nothing but that Joe Blue Goose had gone, with the men, warning that he had gone for good. In his anxiety Blue Pete asked to speak to Mountain Stream, but this was denied him.

Impatient, he looked about for some means of escape. His guns had been taken from him, but every Indian had a rifle, and most of them was done. To arm himself at their expense presented little difficulty, but it would alienate his friends.

Winter approached rapidly to break November, and he could not afford to wait. The Indians themselves were preparing for it, repacking huts in the walls, building protection for the ponies, and even, because of the heavy frost, frost-deeper into the mountains to provide meat for the coming season.

Several days passed and still no change or communication except that his guards became more motion and silent, preventing the talk and learning it to him. Everything and every one seemed to be against him. Nothing as yet had happened to suggest his state of the last capture, and he had no inkling of what had happened to Joe Blue Goose. Now that the Blackfoot was gone he had no plans. He had counted on keeping it safe with Joe, on the hope that sooner or later he would be led to the hiding place of North Wind. Now the promise of that was gone.

One night he lay on his upturned bed wide awake and restless. His two guards were in their usual places, one lying before the door, the other squatted across the hut somewhere in the dark, a rifle across his knees. It was a fully light and the frames had been set up before the openings in the walls, so that only a few rays from the moonlight outside filtered through the unglazed cracks.

Joe Blue Pete it was not so dark. His strained eyes were almost unable like in their ability to see in the dark. That day much to his disgust a fresh bed had been made for him, and the creak of the new boughs betrayed every movement

As it reaches its apex, he reflects on the edge of the bed and
lay there

Now, had either been the arrangement. The two guards had made themselves as comfortable as they could. The arrangement was that each of them should turn out at 11, but the change in the time was not made. As a result, when the time came, they were both sleeping. When about 10:30 the intruders came, they were both asleep.

Figure 1 shows the results of the two-way ANOVA. The main effect of sex was not significant ($F_{1,10} = 0.00$, $p = 0.96$). The main effect of age was significant ($F_{1,10} = 10.00$, $p = 0.01$). The interaction effect was not significant ($F_{1,10} = 0.00$, $p = 0.96$). The effect of sex was not significant in the two-way ANOVA, suggesting that the effect of age on the dependent variable was not moderated by sex.

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

As a result of the above, the following theorem can be proved.

1. *What is the purpose of the study?*
 2. *What are the research questions or hypotheses?*
 3. *What is the study design?*
 4. *What is the sample size and how was it selected?*
 5. *What are the variables being studied?*
 6. *What are the data collection methods?*
 7. *What are the results of the study?*
 8. *What are the conclusions and implications of the study?*

Next a top-level manager's team then had returned to the business people, business during the time, meeting them, driving with them. Not a good example and a way of help after to see the facts. But for this, toward the managers, a sample of managers and their ideas, working a little into the market.

It is a wonderful treat to read the child's letter and respond.

around to the shaded side hugging the walls. A dog somewhere whined sleepily and Blue Pete's teeth bared.

Keeping the door of the cabin he listened. He had no idea of the plan of the interior, but by the size of the building he suspected that it contained more than one room to ensure the chief's privacy.

Once before he had entered a chief's house by night, but that time it was a tepee, and the entrance of the tent had been a crash of the skins of which the tent was made, almost smothering the chief and his squaw.¹ There had been no difficulty in entering there, and he knew that in emergencies he could cut his way in anywhere. He had been after his guns, and as he stood listening now he wondered if his bowie-knife might not be inside the walls beside him. The thought stiffened his purpose.

Carefully feeling the latch he found that it worked noiselessly, and he opened the door and entered.

To his surprise the room was flooded with moonlight. It entered through a window of glass in a side he had not before seen. In the centre of the room was a long table, its sides lined with horse made benches. But what interested him most was a rack of rifles on the wall opposite the door. But his own rifle and revolver were not in sight.

Crossing the room he examined the weapons more closely, and found them all rusted. A .45 Winchester he took down, and turned to face a doorway that led from one wall. It was covered by a thick blanket and from beyond came a gentle snoring. With his ear close to the blanket he listened. There would probably be a squaw with the chief, and he feared her more than the chief, for a squaw's sense of protection was keen.

Keeping his body well in the opening to cut off the light from the outer room, he drew the blanket back.

It was light enough inside to make out a huge brass bed piled with furs, and beneath the furs were two forms. Neither had heard him enter, for the snoring now came from both. He stepped through and let the blanket fall behind him. The rifle rested easily in the crook of his left arm, and a slight smile twisted his lips as he leaned back against the wall and waited.

The pair slept on.

Impatient the half-breed drew the blanket back and let the moonlight stream in on the bed.

¹ *Blue Pete Page a Debt.*

It was the woman who walked first. Her head lifted and, slowly from the back of the hut, and a pair of wide eyes stared at him. She returned there, and then, with a single movement, sat down on the floor, her hand at the same time for a rifle whose stock protruded from beneath the bed.

Blue Pete had not moved. The rifle shifted upward, but still he stood. His own rifle hung innocently at the back of his arm. He chuckled.

"Lighter Dark," he said at last, "has always felt so much concerned the welfare of Mountain Stream that twice he has saved my life, and now, through a pique, he has sent him no money when he had been at his mercy. Three times he could have taken his life, but he wanted to let Mountain Stream accuse him of wanting it."

The square woman had aroused the beds, and now, looking rather nervous. At the same time a penetrating arrow from the hut where Blue Pete had looked his guests in the eyes, permeating the air. The half-breed looked his thanks to all the women.

"Lighter Dark might also have escaped," he said. "But he knew he was safe among friends. His guests slept. He walked out and he said to them, 'He had asked to speak with Mountain Stream, and had been refused. There was only this way of reaching the chief. Does Mountain Stream still think him guilty of wanting to die?'"

The square had slipped back out of sight, and covered her head with the rug, but a low whimper of fear continued. With anxious eyes, Mountain Stream glared her.

The water had opened and several horses entered, three carrying riders. The two guests released rushed on and stood with bowed heads before the hut. With a frown he looked them over, ignoring the half-breed. For several seconds no one spoke.

Suddenly, Mountain Stream raised his hand and pointed.

"Take him back. If he escapes again it will not be well for you. In the morning I will speak."

Blue Pete stepped forward and placed the rifle on the bed. Then, with a bow, he turned and walked from the hut, followed by the two guests. He was not sure that he had done his case any good, but it had at least made Mountain Stream promise to think things over. At any rate, he had had to stand his risk. If the chief were still unreasonable there would be other means of escape, and it was evident that no immediate measures against him were planned.

But as he stands before the question of the growth of the nation, a new large field has opened up before him. He is an individual, and he stands now with a new power against every man. He can do as he will and measure his power by the results of his efforts, and even the days may come when he

[illegible]

There are many good reasons for being skeptical about the effectiveness of these particular methods. First, the direct (reproductive) impact of the intervention is that the target population has a higher probability of having a lower sexual activity rate. However, the indirect impact is that the intervention is more likely to be adopted by a larger number of people, which may lead to a higher overall impact. This is the case for the intervention in the present study.

At the same time, a group of men, most of whom were white, were forming what has become known as the "white man's league." When the two groups met together, they would meet on the porch of a white person's house, and the door would be closed to anyone who was not white.

[illegible][illegible]

Working often with an overboard—the lawyer and a former member of the government—through the machine gun, he saw that a split among his comrades in fact was not the main reason. A second reason is why he must be overboard again that a storm engendered. It threatened to break and he found a little bit of reason but still from some sort of desperate action that would be sure to bring disaster.

"Mountain Stream knows, now, that it was not you who shot him."

All Blue Pete was conscious of was a feeling of resentment and indignation. "Took him a darn long time to find it out," he growled. "Gor-swizzle, anythin' mighta happened—an' purty near did! I jes' don' like the way things bin goin' round here. Ef he'd had any sorta common sense he'd 'a' seed it long ago. But then wotchu expect from a darn . . ." He stopped in time, his antipathy to the Indians had almost broken into words.

"I proved it for him," said Joe Blue Goose.

"You? Wotchu know 'bout it, 'ceptin' wot I told yuh? He didn't h'ave yuh oacet."

"I proved it," repeated the Blackfoot.

"I don' see how yuh . . ."

But Joe Blue Goose had stepped back into the crowd.

CHAPTER XX

THE FRIEND DISAPPEARS

THE moon blacked out suddenly. The wind rose. Snow eddies whirled about the open space in the heart of the encampment. Blue Pete stepped into the open. At the back of the crowd he saw dimly in the darkness two Indians detach themselves and fade into the night. One was Joe Blue Goose.

Mountain Stream pushed forward then, the Indians parting to let him through. Wrapped tightly in a gaudy blanket, he stood with braced legs before the halfbreed. He bowed low.

"Light-in-Dark," he said, "did not speak with a forced tongue. We accepted him as a brother, and we should have known. The days when Indian tribes fought one another are past, and now the Pagan and the Blood and the Cree can be brothers. Light-in-Dark has proven himself a good friend and a great warrior, and our doors are open to him. This is his home."

Blue Pete tried to imitate the bow, feeling silly in the effort. The formality was typical of the Indians, they made a ceremony of the most ordinary events. But he saw how

much he might need their friendship and he swallowed his embarrassment and indignation and tried to accept without qualification the extended hand. The whole story he knew would spread through the camps and gain him a welcome wherever he went.

'Light o' Dark has never been anything but a friend,' he said. 'It has pleased him that he was able to be useful to Mountain Stream. In English he growled under his breath. An el vuh don git outa here pronto an' lea' me alone. I'll bote muh name in yer neck, yuh damned Noche.'

Mountain Stream issued a sharp order, and the two guards emerged from the hut and vanished. With a wave of his hand he swept the other Indians back. Then he removed the gaudy new blanket from his own shoulders and placed it over his late prisoner's.

'Winter is here,' he said. 'There will be more blankets for our new friend and many furs. Tomorrow my men will seal every crack in the hut so that Light o' Dark may be comfortable through the long season of cold. Wood for his fires will be brought and a squaw will do his work for him. Blue Pete will remain through the winter, a great hunter to hunt with us. There is game for his rifle and fur is high in Edmonton. In these northern mountains is moose and better fur than he ever knew in the south.

Without waiting for a reply, he waved his men away and strode after them, leaving Blue Pete none too happy about it all. As he turned back to the hut he remembered that he had no guns, and he swung about and made for the chief's hut. As he reached the door voices from within reached him. The chief was speaking.

"If it had been otherwise it would have grieved us. Light-in-Dark has been a real friend, and we need his rifle this winter."

"It is exactly as he said, and as I told Mountain Stream." It was the voice of Joe Blue Goose. Had Mountain Stream not been so badly wounded he would have understood. But when one is wounded almost to death his mind is not clear. Everything seemed to be as he saw it. It has taken much travel and time and trouble to bring proof, but, I have done so."

"It is well," declared Mountain Stream.

Blue Pete moved away. It would not be well to be caught

overdropping and he could afford to wait. But he wished to speak to the Blackfoot and with that in mind he withdrew around the corner to wait for him to leave the hut.

A few minutes later the door opened. Blue Pete shd his eyes around the corner. Two Indians left the cabin but the storm was now too thick to distinguish them and he dare not take a chance. Joe Blue Goose was probably one, but who was the other?

As he passed over it the pair disappeared. For a moment he considered following them but then Joe Blue Goose would know he had been listening. It would be held against him. In the morning would be time enough to find out what he wished to know.

After waiting where he was for several minutes he approached the door again and knocked. Mountain Stream's voice bade him enter and he pushed the door open.

Inside he bowed apologetically. Light or Dark is a hunter with nothing to hunt with a brother without his own things. Mountain Stream has forgotten.

The chief at first annoyed by the intrusion bowed and disappeared into the other room. Through the blanket that had been caught back Blue Pete saw him kneel on the board floor and crouch beneath the bed. With the rifle and both revolvers he returned and held them out.

"It is the shame of him who so unforgivably misunderstood his brother that the guns were ever taken from him," he apologized. He pointed to the killed rack on the wall. "If there is anything more Light or Dark has but to help himself."

Blue Pete grinned happily as his hands closed on the familiar weapons and he shook his head. 'Yuh san' got nothin like these he commented in English. 'I'd stack 'em up in yer hull battery. Yuh think yuh're a king,' he mused. 'but give me one bullet or lead from any one o' these an yuh're jus a dead Neche.'

He remembered then and thanked the chief in his own language.

In a few minutes he was back in the hut where he had so recently been under guard and almost before the crunch of the new spruce boughs ceased he was sound asleep.

He awakened early with a driving urge in his mind. For a time he lay wondering what was so urgent then he remembered Joe Blue Goose.

He remembered too with deepest chagrin that he had felt only a mild curiosity at that time about the Blackfoot's companion. Though it was apparent enough that it was through him the girl had come. Thinking it over he could not see that he could be any use but the Indian who had been so anxious to get away the moment he saw Blue Pete.

During the days of his imprisonment he had often thought over the scene there on the mountain side. The would-be murderer interested him little. Indian feuds were not uncommon. Mountain women had spoken with confidence of the disappearance of the old-time Indian feuds but in a practical form they still existed now between individuals rather than between tribes. The Indians were so accustomed to applying their own penalties for infractions of their laws, as long as they could conceal it from the Mounted Police and the army started feuds. Complete dominance of the white man's laws was merely a cover for theirullen resentment against them though each succeeding generation accepted them with less disfavour.

It was the other Indian the one who had driven the would-be murderer off who had later come to the protection of Blue Pete who interested him most. Why had he turned and run? There was of course the possibility that he mistook Blue Pete for a friend of the other Indian but that was impossible for he had later fired a shot that had driven the first Indian off. It was all too strange.

It was so strange that he felt he must have the explanation without delay.

He was surprised on opening the door of his hut to see the amount of snow that had fallen while he slept. He had hardly been aware of the wind but it had disturbed him little. The two blankets they had given him kept him too comfortable to care what happened outside. But now he found a bank of snow driven against his door part of it falling inside as the door opened. He kicked it out and let his crooked eyes wander over the spotless white.

Several doors about the side of huts opened almost at the same time and dark faces appeared. Two or three of the Indians waved at him and he responded but a glance had told him that as yet to see had seen a guest from the chief's cabin. It worried him though he could not understand why. Unhappily he stepped outside and started around before the inner circle of huts.

As the rescuer of their beloved chief the attitude of the Indians he saw now had altered to a warm welcome. In the uncanny way of Indians, even hut as he neared it appeared to be aware of his presence and the doors opened to give greeting. To his surprise he felt his antipathy to the race lessening. A grin spread over his face as he went along.

Then new friendship however held his attention lightly. His one thought was to find Joe Blue Goose and demand the proof he had brought the evening before. He thought it unwise to approach the Blackfoot openly; he counted on coming on him in the round he was making of the tribe.

Presently he loosed himself around before his own hut and he had seen no sign of Joe. Passing through to the second row of cabins he repeated the circle. Still no Blackfoot.

Boldly then he crossed the open space to Mountain Stream's cabin and knocked. The door opened suddenly so suddenly that he had a feeling that the chief had watched his movements ever since leaving his own cabin. The chief stepped outside closing the door behind him. No sign of friendliness showed on his stolid face.

'Light as Dark sleep well?' he asked.

Something in the coldness of his manner, a wall against which he knew he would beat in vain, made Blue Pete's response short.

'Light as Dark always sleeps well because he has nothing on his conscience even when Mountain Stream thought him a murderer. It took much to convince him. Where I come from—'

He stopped in time. The proof that Joe Blue Goose brought. I would know what it was. I have a right to know. Only two Indians—other Indians—were there. The one who shot you would never dare admit it. The other—who is he?'

Mountain Stream straightened. 'The proof was complete,' he said, and closed his lips.

'Where is Joe Blue Goose?

'Joe Blue Goose has gone—whence he came.'

'You mean back to Medicine Hat?'

Mountain Stream's eyes bored into him. 'You know he came from Medicine Hat.'

'He told me so—I thank I remember that.' It was a narrow escape. He has proven himself a friend of mine, because he saved me from your enemy.'

"Hah!" The chief was silent for a moment. "It is strange that he should tell anyone but me where he came from."

Blue Pete thought quickly. "Perhaps I only thought it. I have met Blackfoot from Medicine Hat they have an encampment there. They have none in the southern foothills."

"What do you know about Medicine Hat?" demanded the chief.

"I have been through it nothing more. Once I went as far east as Winnipeg." He returned frown for frown. "What does Mountain Stream accuse me of now? Am I no longer his brother?"

"I—do not know." The Indian was troubled. "So many things have happened. It is wise to be careful. Joe Blue Goose is not of my tribe, neither are you. He has told me a story, you have not—not been frank." His face had become more grim. "Joe Blue Goose has gone."

He turned away. To the half-breed it was the end of everything. With the Blackfoot gone he was left without a plan, with no direction to take. The search might last all winter—and then fail.

He spoke quickly. "I would thank him for what he has done for me. I had no chance to do it last night."

Mountain Stream said over his shoulder. "He is gone. When the storm has ceased—for there is more to come—the big winter hunt will commence. Light-in-Dark will hunt with us. He will share our catch. My wound is almost better. Light-in-Dark and I will hunt together. I have spoken."

He entered the hut and closed the door.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FIGHT IN THE NIGHT

BLUE PETE wandered back to his hut and sat down to think things over. It was plain that he still was a prisoner of a sort. In the minds of the tribe, except for the chief he had been vindicated, but Mountain Stream was more intelligent. He still saw reason for suspicion. That suspicion he himself had increased by his thoughtless directness in enquiring for the Blackfoot.

Mountain Stream had spoken the half and the half breed were to hunt as companions. In other words Mountain Stream had made up his mind to keep an eye on his guest.

Even with the best interpretation of the decision it meant delay. And already he had spent almost a month in fruitless wandering, and winter was almost on them. He ground his teeth together and fingered his 45 magnificently.

A squaw entered and started to prepare his breakfast. He did not speak to her. All the rest of the morning he sat and brooded.

In the afternoon he set out once more to circle the camp. The Indians had not yet set out for the hunt, waiting for the coming dawn to haul the f out before setting their traps. When they did start he would be forced to do his share. As he went along he kept looking for tracks leaving the camp, and at a point not far from his own hut he found them racing away into the forest.

Thinking with hope that they would be there for him later, he lay down early and slept.

He had gone carefully through his pack sack, and now he fastened under the straps his warmest blanket, the new one the chief had given him as proof of their continued friendship.

He had no ammunition, however, and no food. The latter he knew he could pick up somehow as he went along, but shells for his guns he must have, and he had failed at the time to notice that Mountain Stream had not returned his ammunition with the guns. Somehow he must secure a supply.

It meant a raid on one of the huts, and that would be dangerous, and certainly not improve his relations with the tribe. The chief's hut and his own were the only ones he had been in, but he knew that the other huts would probably be single rooms like his own. But they would be crammed with Indians. He had seen where the chief kept his armoury, and there lay his best chance. Moccasins and snowshoes, too, he must have for he could not get about in the snow without them. Two pairs of shoes hung in his hut, so that he need have no further for that essential part of his equipment. Moccasins of the proper size would be more difficult to find, for his feet were larger than the Indians.

He thought of the broncho he had brought "now-stabled" with the Indian ponies in satisfactory shelter. He had grown

load of the animal but he would have to leave him— one could not get about in the snow on horseback. The Indians would look after him for their own sakes. If the time came when he required a mount he could easily steal him back.

Opening the door of the hut he looked out. Save for the distant howl of a mountain lion everything was still as death. But as he stood listening the wind blew uncertainties into his eyes, and he knew the threatened storm was near.

As he wiped the flakes from his face he noticed he saw a movement across the open space between the huts. His hand had blocked his eyes at the moment so that he could not be certain, but by the tingling in his veins he knew he had not been deceived. Sliding along the wall of the hut he turned the corner and waited.

For a long time nothing happened. Impatient he set off around the circle between the rows of huts, keeping his eyes about him to avoid waking the dogs that were curled now, he knew, in the snow.

Through the open spaces between the huts he spent a few moments looking as he came to each, but still everything was as it should be.

He had completed half the circle when a figure darted across the open space not far from where he stood, making directly for the chief's hut.

Blue Pete turned and retraced his steps until he reached a point where the chief's hut screened him from where he thought the intruder had taken shelter in the shadow of the wall. Then he too ran swiftly across and crouched beneath the overhanging roof.

He was at the back of the chief's hut. He had no exact idea of where the night visitor was, and he could not guess who it might be, but he knew he had no right to be there. Whatever the fellow had in mind required investigating.

Holding his breath he listened. From within the hut he could hear the fuel breathing loudly, but from outside came no sound. He stood with his back to the wall so that his crooked eyes covered every direction before and at both sides, in case the unknown came suddenly around a corner. His gut empty though it was— he had forgotten that— was ready.

Still a vast silence. Almost trembling with the strain of waiting and listening he set out to investigate. Cautiously working along the wall to the corner, he saw that on that

side the way was clear. He went on. At the front corner he stooped low against the ground, and slowly advanced his head.

The blood leaped in his veins when he saw a man crouched close against the door, evidently listening. His back was to the half-breed.

Blue Pete straightened, took a long breath and started forward. The soft snow gave no sound. He was half-way to the door when the man turned. Then he was off like a deer.

He was not swift enough. In a few long leaps Blue Pete was on him, crashing him into the snow, his hand pressed tightly over his mouth. He need not have taken the precaution, for the Indian showed no disposition to make an outcry, additional proof that he was a trespasser. But he did fight, and desperately, his teeth closing on Blue Pete's arm in the struggle. They penetrated no farther than the leather jacket before the half-breed wrenched himself free and struck. The man's head dropped backward, and he lay limp.

For a few moments Blue Pete lay beside him, wondering if the fight had aroused the camp or the dogs. But in the snow they had made little noise, and neither had uttered a sound. Rising then, he jerked the man upright and let him fall over his shoulder.

As he closed the door of his own hut behind them a dog whined and barked nervously, several more gave tongue. It would be sure to arouse some of the Indians, but he and his victim were safe. He dumped the man on the ground, tied him swiftly in the dark and hurried to the door to watch through a narrow crack.

He was excited and happy. It was not that he had perhaps once more saved the chief's life, or that he had won a fight, but that his hands had told him that the ammunition he required was now his for the taking. A belt and a shoulder-strap on the unconscious Indian were packed with shells, and he knew they were of the proper calibre. Further investigation discovered two packets filled with the same size shells.

The sound of a door opening somewhere warned him that the dogs had been heard, but he had no fear of discovery now. Indeed, the barking of the dogs would be a service, for if the Indians searched now, and found nothing, they

would not be alarmed when his movements again disturbed the dogs.

In the dark he removed his captive's two axes. They were too small for comfort but they would have to serve until he could obtain better. The snowshoes he had selected from the two pairs hanging on the wall he took down and strapped across his pack sack. As yet the snow was not deep enough to sled them. Then, rifle in hand, while the dogs bled harshly nervously, he crept from the hut leaving his one prisoner to the strip of everything he could use.

As he crept back through the two circles of huts the dogs increased their clamour, but halfheartedly, and in a few minutes he was clear of the encampment.

He had set out without a definite plan, beyond the fact that he would work around the camp to the trail left by the Blue Goose and his companion. In the snow this would be easy to follow. Even in the night he could find it though it would be necessary to await daylight before following it deep into the forest. At any rate, by the time the Indians were about he would be miles away.

It was not difficult to find the trail at the edge of the clearing, and he followed it into the trees. In a thicket the snow had failed to penetrate he lay down in the blanket he had brought and slept.

His first race on waking was to make sure once more of the trail, back tracking it to the encampment and from there he set out with a light heart.

He had gone only a few steps, however, when a disturbing thought occurred to him. Would the Indian he had left unconscious come to his senses and give the alarm? He decided against it. The fellow would be even more anxious than himself to get away unnoticed.

But who was he? He upbraided himself for not having troubled about that before. He should have struck a light and satisfied himself on that point. All he had thought of was the ammunition and moccasins he furnished. Suddenly his mind flew back to the scene on the mountain side when Mountain Stream was shot. Now he had prevented another such attack, and had not bothered to see who had made the attack?

Could it be the same man in both attacks?

It struck him forcibly too that it might concern him more than as a mere matter of identifying the chief's assassin. So compelling was the thought that he turned back.

It was broad daylight now, and the Indians would probably know that he had run away. If he met them it would be difficult to explain, but his curiosity was too keen to think of that. He was almost within sight of the camp when a burst of rifle-fire brought him to a stop. Only for an instant, then he dashed forward. He was in time to see half a dozen Indians running about between the huts on the other side of the camp. From the forest beyond came another shot, and then every door in the encampment was open, with Indians rushing out, bearing rifles.

A few of those he had seen first returned, now, and an excited conference took place. At the end, a group set off through the huts into the forest, all of them armed.

It was not difficult to surmise what had happened. The Indian he had left unconscious had come to his senses. He had been seen making his escape, and was now being followed.

Blue Pete decided to do some trading himself. He had to find out for himself who the Indian he had fought with was. It seemed very important now. Accordingly he set off around the camp through the woods, making for the direction the Indians had taken. He ran off at top speed, and presently he knew, by the sounds, that he was overtaking them. He found their trail, and rounded away from it. The Indians were advancing cautiously, evidently fearing an ambush. The half-breed delayed for nothing. He had put on his snow-shoes, for the snow was deeper.

CHAPTER XXII

AN OLD ENEMY

BLUE PETE was uneasy. He knew the risk he took, both from pursued and pursuer. But something else weighed on him, and he did not stop to work out what it was. When, however, he reached a more open part of the forest he understood. The sky was heavily overcast, sure warning that the storm was very near.

It came to him, with a shock, that the snow would wipe out the Blackfoot's trail, and once more he would be at a loose end. With the thought he turned back. To find Joe Blue Goose was the more important thing to do.

He went at full speed recklessly, thinking only of the threatening storm. Only his fleetness saved him—that and the protective instinct that warned him of danger. He had for the moment forgotten the Indians and he almost ran into them. The sound of low voices immediately before him sent him hurrying to one side to take shelter behind a shrub.

The Indians, however, saw his tracks, paused for a few moments and set out after him. Without waiting for more, Blue Pete started away, keeping the shrub between him and the Indians.

They saw him and a cry went up. It is probable that in the hasty glimpse they had of him they took him for the other Indian, for the cry was repeated from the camp and two or three shots were fired at him.

Thereafter he had to depend on his fleetness of foot, though he paused long enough to return a single shot over their heads to delay them. Thereafter they moved advance more cautiously, giving him time to get safely away.

It came to him, as he ran, that he had added complication to complication, and he knew no way to face them but to flee. He had left the encampment with no thought but to find Joe Blue (some) in the hope that the trail would end at North Wind. He saw now that sooner or later the Indians would have found his trail and set out after him, convinced that his effort to escape was pure guilt. Now he did not know what was best to do. If he continued after Joe Blue (some) they might suspect what was in his mind and intercept him, making more directly for the Blackfoot's destination. For he fully believed Mountain Stream knew the purpose of Joe Blue (some)'s presence in the foothills. The Indians might be at the end of the trail to receive him.

His one chance was to outdistance them, and with that in mind he increased his speed.

For a time he forgot the threatened storm, but the rapidly growing darkness reminded him, and the sudden whine of the rising wind in the tree-tops, and the cold touch of the first snowflakes, sent him hurrying on.

He greeted the storm with a low groan of disappointment. It would take little more to reveal the trail he followed, and recklessly he cut back, close to the encampment. Three dogs raced at him, snarling at his heels. He would have shot them, but for the fact that it would do him no good, and only

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He is giving the final word on this matter, but he does have one more point, and he says that in a very few hours it would be wiped out.

So a 100% increase for the Indians would be the best bet. But a 100% increase would mean far out-dating them at birth, and for the same reasons. With a good effort, we might reach 100% within three years, though.

In a short time the first morning has he was forced to get up early, he had to make a effort to do it, and he was the first. And then the second day, perhaps he was a little more far from him, and he was not too far from him. This is the end of the first morning.

A singing male from a different group entered the first open territory and sang the song several times. He then flew past on the left side of the first male. The second male sang a series of female songs and trills. He sang once then he sang little bits of the song. It would have been possible for him to have then entered the first male's territory singing over a leg of the road and then singing the song from the other side. I did not see any of these behaviors. He then flew by singing a few trills and singing several times from some distance over the other side of the road.

All these projects, he stated, would delay the Indians for days, if not weeks. There were but two alternatives: following a trail to the Humber River and camp for one week.

The same was taking place in a thick fog and he felt sorry that he was safe at last in an unharmed person. So that again his thoughts turned in the direction of the direction the man had taken he knew the destination was somewhere large in the mountains and he directed his way without losing by water stroke back to come on the trail where the man was kept back of his overhanging trees.

Picture 4. That it set him walking about over a wide area, and he remembered the Indians. Turning back within sight of the timber line—that had been his camp—he kept on for a long time and concluded that the parties he ordered the Indians directed to the others, just as he had been.

Time must be set out together. The storm had increased, and with the approach of evening the temperature dropped quickly. He commenced to think of some place to spend the

night, some shelter where he might escape the storm. The deepening snow itself would protect him from the cold.

Suddenly he pulled up and listened. Above the storm a sound had reached him. A twig had distinctly snapped. He edged away and waited. Another snap, but nothing more. It paralyzed him. There, in the timber limit maze from which the sound had come, he knew his trail would still be distinct enough, and whether animal or man, the trail was being followed by someone or something he could not see. It could not be the Indians; they would make more noise, and they could not have passed him, for the sound was before him now.

He stood hesitating.

Definitely, the sounds came from the direction of the trail he must have left. He turned in nearer and kept pace with them.

He knew the risk he took. With the ground covered with snow he could not hope to continue far without some betraying sound. The snow, while deep enough to conceal the ground beneath, would not deaden the sound of a broken twig—just such sounds as he had heard. And he knew the unseen thing in there was trying not to make a noise.

Too distant from the blaze to see through the storm, after a time he grew impatient and worked his way nearer. For a time he heard nothing further. It made him anxious—reckless. Had the man there in the clearing of the blaze—for he was certain now it was a man—heard him, and stopped to wait for him, or had he got too far ahead to be heard through the storm?

He hurried on.

The warning sense of immediate danger brought him up sharply, and he stood looking about, trying to see through the storm. Before him the clearing of the timber limit led through the fall snowfall, and for a time he could see nothing in that direction.

Suddenly a blast of wind cleared a space before him.

In its heart stood an Indian, staring straight at him. A rifle was in his hand, and it pointed at the half breed.

Too quick for thinking, Blue Pete threw himself to one side, as the bullet went whistling over him.

He had his own revolver out, an automatic movement, but he had as yet no way of knowing if the Indian was friend or foe. Anyone might shoot under such conditions. It might indeed, be Joe Blue Goose himself. He had to be sure.

For a few seconds he lay still, then started up on hands and

knees, moving along parallel with the blaze, trying to find an opening in the storm, thinking to get nearer from another and safer direction. At any rate, he had to be sure before he would shoot.

Not a sound reached him now but the howling of the wind, and after a time he rose to his feet. Where he stood among the trees the snow fell less thickly than in the clearing, and he could see, with a fair amount of definition, right up to the timber blaze. There he waited.

Suddenly from the mist of snow the Indian came into view. He, too, had shifted his position. Now he was forty yards away, his back to the half breed. And he, too, was listening. Blue Pete waited to see more clearly.

The Indian turned slowly, caught a glimpse of him and leaped behind a thicket with a startled cry. Blue Pete recognized him—the bank-robber!

CHAPTER XXIII

RESCUED

THE thought that had made him hesitate to use his gun was not consideration for human life. It was no sudden tenderness or reluctance to treat the Indian as he deserved. Rather, it was disgust with himself for being so blind and careless. The light of a sudden revelation crowded from his mind, for a moment that might have been fatal, the threat of that hostile gun.

He saw it all now. The Indian he had fought beside the chief's cabin, whom he had carried to his own hut and kept there in the dark without troubling to see who it was, was the one who had already tried three times to kill him. Obsessed with blood-lust—it never died out in brutes of his type—he had thought he saw a chance to complete the murder he had attempted that day on the mountain-side. He had dared to sneak into the camp and right to the chief's door, and only Blue Pete's fortuitous interference had prevented the murder. Yet, with the Indian in his power, he himself had thought only of his own need of ammunition and moccasins!

What had happened after he left the camp he could envisage. The Indian, on coming to his senses, had released himself

He remembered how anxious he had found him, and discovering that he had not shells and munitions had set out to supply himself. This proved to cost of the hunt the Indian had started after him.

His previous information concerning the Indians' war age was proved completely correct. He had succeeded in throwing his managers off his track and deflected the storm, and he crawled back to the camp, exhausted and picked up Blue Pete's tail.

It occurred to the half-breed that possibly the Indian had not been so badly off as he seemed, since he was injured in the fight but retaining his wits and trying to do something about it. He had been so tired and so angry that he had thrown away all of his guns and ammunition. He had not been able to get his gun, certainly he appeared to have no weapons. Blue Pete, and with the same dogged persistence he had displayed in attempting Mountain Stream, since he had set out to avenge what the half-breed had done.

His own aggressiveness and the Indians' delicate resolution sent a wave of anger through the half-breed, and he ran back, knowing that the spot where he had seen the Indian. In the storm it would be impossible to attack him now, he realized what a threat the Indian was. Now, before he had been injured by his own men, the half-breed to the south, and it had almost ended his mission. He said he had seen through all right that was a spite, a determined enemy, and later he had saved him from his path. But in that he made himself a victim for an enemy's enemy.

The storm had settled down more thickly, but there were occasional moments that showed hope. Particularly in the thick of the trees the wind was less blinding, and he might be able to see his way. He preferred the darkness to his rifle. It was more useful, handier, and with it, anger was more easily.

His anger was against him from the shelter of the thicket and beyond for his recklessness. The Indian had changed his position and was waiting for him. And he was here and ready to fight. A shot rang out.

Blue Pete then hurried to one side. It was too late. The bullet struck into his right arm, knocking the gun from his hand. But even as he fell he managed to grab the gun with his left hand, and he could shoot with either hand.

¹ Blue Pete Pays a Debt.

² Blue Pete Attacks the Indian.

³ Blue Pete Outlines.

But in falling he crashed into the side of a tree. It caught him on the forehead and he lost consciousness. He did not hear the second shot fired at him.

Retaining senses, even as part of an uneasy dream, a terrible dream, his first impression was of coldness over him, then of warmth. It seemed, he felt, he lay with some one above, the fragrance of a flower hanging in the air around him. He did not what had happened. The voices were audible, but not the words.

Then came fever, a man and a woman, in flowing robes.

His mind was a chaos, then he recalled the storm. A short, sharp pain in his head brought a flash of vision, and notably the whispering ceased. He opened his eyes.

The walls of a hospital surrounded him, and for a brief moment he thought the Indians had helped him and had arrived him here in their warm regard. Then his eyes sought the windows and he saw that the great wall was not the trees before. He blinked at these unexpected things.

He lay on a thick bed of Indian boughs, and beneath his head had been placed a strong, padded bundle of three branches. A few feet away, underneath the which was concealed by a pair of blankets, hung from a rope that stretched from wall to wall. The vision he had heard had come from somewhere near the blankets. Now everything was still, but by a flutter in one of the blankets he knew that it had not taken its place.

The room was warm, and he tried to turn aside, to comfort that covered him. But his right arm was bound to his side and held in place by splints. He tried to rise to have some hot the movement was too painful, and with a groan he stopped back and lost interest in everything.

Slowly memory returned. His last memory, before losing consciousness, was of a bullet entering his arm near the shoulder, and of throwing himself sideways to avoid it. But his leg too was in splints, and he had not heard that shot shot. His left hand felt at the wet place in his head now covered with a bandage.

The Indian back-biter had done it, he lived vividly through the final few minutes in the storm. But how had he escaped as well as he did? Who had found him, and who were the past friends, the blankets.

When that he raised his head

For a later no sound reached him, then someone stepped across the floor beyond the blankets and went outside softly

opening and closing the door. The edge of a blanket moved and a pretty Indian woman's face peered through at him.

Something about it brought a smile to the half-breed's lips. The sweetness of that dusky face, a sweetness combined with shyness and fear, made him think of Mira, his white wife.

He knew so little of women, had even spoken to few. His early life had been spent with his Indians in that far desert but she had lived while he was still young and he had gone out for himself. Until an event threw him in with Mira, he had been as one ever since, so far as women were concerned, a rustler most of the time, a solitary rider, a rancher about the Montana Badlands until before the guns, the angry cowboys and cowboys and of other rustlers, he fled to Canada.

Nursed now in his helplessness by a pretty Indian woman, when he hated Indians so intensely, was so far out of any picture he could have imagined that it seemed ridiculous. And so he grinned back at her.

"Where am I," he enquired in Cree. "And how do I come to be here? I remember a shot and a fall."

"Light is Dark," said a soft voice, "was injured. He was brought here." She spoke Cree haltingly.

Blue Pete frowned. "You know my name?" He spoke now in the Marakoot language. "Where am I?"

Her face brightened and she replied in the same language. "Blue Pete is safe here."

The surprise of it brought him up on his left elbow with a jerk, but the pain of arm and leg and head were too much for him and he fell back to be staring at her.

"You know me?"

The name must have slipped from her, for her hand flew up to her eyes and a frightened look appeared in her dark eyes. She made no answer.

"How did you know my name?" he persisted.

"You," you spoke of it, you were unconscious. The blanket started to fall out of place.

"Don't go," he pleaded. "Surely you were told my name. Was it Joe Blue Goose? No one else here in the mountains knows it."

Her brow puckered. "Joe-Blue Goose? Who is he?" Her head shook and she vanished. Moments later the outer door opened and closed and Blue Pete knew he was alone.

He thought of dragging himself to the window. She had

'Blue Pete' Half-breed

probably gone to join the man she had been whispering with a few minutes ago. It was not Joe Blue's guess, he would have recognized that man. The effort there was too much for him, and he feared that his one chance for a rapid recovery was to be lost. However, it didn't seem late to break down a private to his rescuers desired.

He examined his splints, and was surprised at their adequacy. Minor-made and hand-hewn they were nevertheless, what his injuries seemed to require.

What frustrated him most was the agonous delay the unfortunate, who he faced in him. It would be weeks, perhaps months, more he would set out again on the task Inspector Barker had given him, for he knew shoulder and leg were broken. Weeks, and perhaps months, in the mountains he hated, and in the heart of winter. And Blue would not know. The picture was depressing.

It seemed, at any rate, that he was safe for the time being, and in good hands, and therefore was comfortable. Someone had found him unconscious, had armed him there, and somehow had been taken of his injuries. Was Joe Blue's guess concerned in it? Certainly the Indian woman he had seen and the man he had heard, well, not have armed him for. His hundred and eighty-five pounds would call for two men, at least. But the pretty little squaw was evidently not going to solve the mystery for him.

He heard the water drip, drip, and someone moving about beyond the screen of blankets. Desperately he fought against peeping, but darkness was too strong, and he commenced to roll along the floor toward the blankets.

Suddenly they parted, and the woman looked through. When she read his intention she frowned.

"Light matches with friends," she reproved. That was all. Blue Pete grinned listlessly, and waved an apologetic arm. "He was a man who his friends are. Real friends would not keep him in the dark."

She looked at him frowning more. He was found lying under the tree-trunk that other man. He was as if dead. In the cold he would soon have frozen. Is it not enough?

The half-breed turned back to the bed of thoughts. It is more than I can expect," he said. "Who shot me?"

Her pretty shoulders rose and fell. He was not seen. We are Blue. Light in dark's friends. He is injured, but if he keeps quiet, in a moon he will be fit again. Is there more we can do?"

"I will not ask again," he promised. "But how did you come to find me?"

We heard him groan. We could see where he was first shot. He had crawled afterwards under the trees. It was that saved him from worse. Light-in-Dark is not light to carry.

"You did not carry much of me," he said, running his eyes up and down her small body. "You couldn't. Someone else

But I am going to ask no more." He groaned. "You think I'll be here a month?"

"It would not be safe to go sooner. When you are well you may go your way, whatever it is."

He saw her eyes fixed on him with piercing enquiry, and he looked away. He felt as if she would read the purpose of his visit to the foothills, and that must be kept a secret, even from friends like these.

You are a Blackfoot," he said.

"I speak Blackfoot well," she replied, "but I am a Blood."

"What is your name, and where do you come from."

There is a Blackfoot encampment at Medicine Hat.

She nodded. "I have heard of it. I have never been there. My name? Call me nurse. I have fixed other broken bones. Yours are not too bad. The wounds themselves are nothing to you; they will heal in a few days. I had to dig the bullet from your leg. The bark of the wolpus tree and the clean air here are all that is needed. . . . and Light-in-Dark is strong, so very strong."

"Not strong enough to stop a .45 and keep going, it seems," he groaned.

She stood watching him from between the blankets for a long time, and he squirmed beneath her gaze.

"Light-in-Dark, as an Indian, may go anywhere," she remarked slowly, almost as if to herself. "But you are not an Indian. Why are you here? You are a cowboy, I can tell by so many things."

He shrugged his one good shoulder, and flung out his left hand. "I have not punched for a long time—not as a real cowboy. . . . I love hunting. There is game and fur here in the Rockies."

The woman sighed. "Light-in-Dark keeps his secrets." The blankets fell together behind her.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ENEMY AGAIN

DURING the days that followed he made little effort to find out more about her, though his curiosity increased. Often he heard a sigh or a murmur outside as she would go to the door and come back to her. After a few minutes the door would open and a man would enter with her. seldom, however, but he heard her as much as whisper. There were even times when he thought he detected the presence of another in the room by and by.

He was forced to fight back the impulse to look. But they trusted him, and he dare do nothing to kill that trust. It was not that he thought of it as such, that was. For he did not know the meaning of ethics. What he did or wished to do, was merely a matter of personal preference with little thought of right or wrong. But the Indians connected with the abn had done so much for him.

He reasoned with himself about it. The customs of the Indians were well known to him, there might be several reasons for their desire to possess. That they did desire it was proved as well by the manner of the abn. That he was miles from any Indian encampment he knew for there were no Indians. If the Blue Lake was situated in his region he might not make the same view. Mountain Streams and his men might well find the half breed, and the Blackfoot would know that he did not stand so well with his former friends. He was sure for was still his friend.

The same reason might be behind the desire of the woman and her male companion not to be recognized. The woman of course as his name could not help exposing herself.

From what he could see through the window as he lay he concluded that the cabin was well hidden in a gorge in the approach to the higher mountains. It was not a new building it looked like a hastily constructed cabin and not intended for winter quarters, but it had been recently carefully sealed and tightened against the cold. It was the sort of place that might be thrown up by prospectors or timber cruisers. One thing was certain—that it was not easy to find.

The storm during which he had received his injuries had ushered in real winter, but for the following couple of weeks the cold was not extreme. Then came a worse storm than the first, a raging thing that rocked about the cabin and marked its power by the distant crashing of trees. Even there in the gorge the cabin rocked. With the storm came zero weather.

Through it all Blue Pete was never really uncomfortable. The stove in the other portion of the cabin was kept burning fiercely. It failed to send much heat to where the half breed lay, but he was tough. In time, however, inactivity made him more sensitive to the temperature, and the sight of frost gathering on the wall near him made him wonder how bad conditions might become.

One night, seeking more covering, he burrowed deeply into the balsam boughs of his bed. In the midst of the rustling noise he made the blankets parted, and he could see someone standing in the opening, evidently trying to see what he was doing. He gave no sign that he noticed, and presently one of the blankets was untied from the rope and dropped over him.

He chuckled to himself. Now when daylight came he would be able to see into the room beyond, perhaps even the Indian he had not yet seen, but whom he knew to be there. But just before daylight the opening of the outside door awakened him, and against the light he saw a man leave the cabin.

Ashamed that he had looked, he turned his face to the wall. They had known that he was cold, and to cover him, they had taken the risk of exposing what they wished so much to conceal. And the Indian had gone out into the cold before daylight rather than replace the blanket.

Blue Pete cursed himself on his elbow. "Huh," he grunted, "take it! In me mind, I ain't lookin' no more." He spoke in English, forgetting himself.

To his surprise the woman replied in the same language. "We didn't think we should ask you not to look."

The half breed whistled the night in teeth. "One example, I clean forget. So yuh speak English, too, eh? Good. Them Indians at the camp don't, so yuh kin talk all we darn please. Yuh kin bring yer friend back when it's comfy. I ain't common sense to get out in this cold. He mas be clean loco. Git him back. I won't look."

"Thanks. The squaw hurried to the door, and went into the night one of the plaintive cries of the cougar. It was answered and after a time repeated from nearby. The woman opened the door, whispered to someone and two pairs of feet entered. Blue Pete turned his back and snuggled into the extra blanket.

A few nights later he awakened to a gripping sense of danger. As always, when he awakened his wits were instantly alert. He did not open his eyes immediately, but lay listening with bated breath. His first thought was of someone beside his bed, but in a moment he realized the threat was not so near. From beyond the blankets came the quiet breathing of two sleepers.

He opened his eyes.

It was a brilliant moonlit night, and everything on his side of the blankets was visible. For a time he lay listening. He could hear nothing to justify the feeling, yet it remained, and increased.

He raised himself on his elbow.

From somewhere outside his keen ears picked up the low "crunch" of snowshoes. It came nearer, step by slow step, moving so carefully and slowly. He followed it as it approached the cabin from the side beyond the door. It reached the door and stopped.

He had his gun in his hand. His first thought was to shout a warning to the sleepers beyond the blankets, but curiosity was too strong to act immediately. Warned by his call, the intruder would flee.

He raised himself against the wall so that his left hand was free to use the gun. A touch on the door latch would force him to cry out. Or should he drag himself to the blankets and be at hand to protect his sleeping friends?

The need for action of some kind made him take the gun in his teeth and change his position to enable him to creep across to the blankets.

The intruder had not yet moved from the door. Was he merely waiting to make sure that those inside slept, before opening the door and shouting them when they could not protect themselves? Or was it only some wandering Indian, caught in the forest by nightfall and wondering if the cabin was occupied?

Whatever it was, he could not risk neglecting every measure he could take. He edged across to the blankets, and was

trying to place himself in a position where he might draw the blankets aside and yet leave his one good hand free for the gun when the low crunch of the snowshoes moved on. They came toward the window of his room.

Blue Pete swung himself about. A slight shadow fell into the room. Swiftly he faced the window.

Against the mornlit outdoors the upper part of a head appeared. Against the light it was nothing but outline. A face was pressed against the glass.

The half-breed's gun was still between his teeth for in turning he had to use his one free arm. He grabbed for the gun and the prop of his arm removed, he fell sideways.

It was well he did. A gun beyond the window roared. At the same time Blue Pete pulled the trigger. But he was in no position to aim.

The Indians in the other part of the cabin awakened with the two shots and leaped up.

The woman called. "What happened Light or Dark?"

The crunch of rapidly retreating snowshoes was her answer. The outer door flew open, and someone rushed outside, working frantically to don the snowshoes always left sticking in the snow.

Do let him get out after him, nohow, missy," Blue Pete warned in English. "He'll be haden to shoot him."

The blankets parted. "You ain't hurt?"

"Missed me—ag in," chuckled the half-breed. "Reckon yuh'll find the slug in the bottom o' the wall over thar. I fired back. Reckon he seed me an' it upset his aim."

The woman went to the window. "There's only one hole in the glass."

"Shure. I don' shoot to kill till I know I wanta . . . I coudn' a that time ef I'd wanted to, not the way I was fallin'." Reckon I ain't no prize shot w'en I'm that way, an' gotta look after a leg an' arm. Never done much shootin' that way, never hadta."

The Indian who had gone outside was still working at his snowshoes.

Stop him," Blue Pete warned. "T's plumb crazy chasin' him in the night. He's jes' wastin' fer someun to try it. Quick, stop him."

The woman hurried to the door.

"Tell him," Blue Pete called after her, "I'll get the shunk muhself some day. I do want nobody to fool me on that

He's my job. It was me he shot at. Nobody yet there had at me an' got way with it for long. Sober, I wants tell him so to his face.

CHAPTER XXV

A CURIOUS FRIEND

THE affair puzzled Blue Pete. That the midnight visitor had come resolved to kill him or the Indian in the other part of the cabin was certain. Murder was in his mind, or he would never have come at such an hour and with such furtiveness. Besides he had fired point blank.

That he could not have recognized Blue Pete in the moment he had while looking through the window was almost certain, but that he expected to find someone to shoot was equally certain.

The mystery of his new friends might explain the visit. Was it revenge for something they had done? Had they made enemies in their own or in another tribe? Perhaps the woman was the cause of it. She was pretty enough for that.

There might however be another explanation. The bank robber. That the Indian would never be content until he had avenged himself on the half breed was certain. But if it were he how had he discovered where Blue Pete was?

He wondered if his new friends had any idea of the identity of the would be murderer. They were very much upset by the incident and refused to talk. His enquiries of the woman brought only vague replies seldom more than a shaking head. She knew or pretended to know nothing but something about it had frightened her more than he would expect. In part her anxiety was directed to him for she wanted on moving his bed dumbly, beneath the window where he could not be seen and every night her companions made a round of the cabin before retiring. Once the top of his head was visible through the window as he passed.

The half breed's recovery was rapid. The herb applications seemed to do something more than heal the wounds, and the spirits did the rest. But both wounds would leave scars.

With returning mobility he commenced to consider the situation as it stood. The arm had healed quickly, but the

leg was still too weak to use. Nevertheless, he made preparations for getting back to his job.

The moccasins he had taken from the Indian in his hat he had found painfully small and he wondered what he could do about them. They had served a purpose but he knew that for day after day use they were impossible.

The squaw saw him examining them carefully. She said nothing at the time but several days later he found a new pair of thick soft deer skin on the floor made the blankets. Thinking they belonged to one of the Indians he had heard coming and going and that they had come there by mistake he pushed them through. On waking, however, there they were again. He picked them up and examined them curiously. They were beautifully made better than he had ever owned.

Koosah-uh musta got these moccasins somewhere, he said to the woman when he saw her next.

She smiled. Do they fit?

I ain't seed 'em on anybody yet. They always talked in English now. To the half breed it seemed part of their scheme for concealment.

Try them on, yourself, she urged.

He stared at her, rubbing an embarrassed hand across his nose. They'd fit anybody, he told her, anybody wot got a chance to wear 'em.

He slipped a foot into one. It was large leaving room for extra socks and so beautifully soft and flexible. He wriggled his foot comfortably in it. When he looked up she was gone.

I ain't I ain't done nothin' fer this, he stammered. "I jee-eh-uh-uh-uh fer vuh to look after all these weeks. I bin a damned nuisance. I bet an I reckon I bin nasty lots o' times. That's cause I ain bin laid up so long before, never. Oncet a woman nursed me."

I married her. Oncet er twice more they put me in a hospital but I didn't stay long. Feelin' well, I do an hevin to be here an do nothin'. It don't suit me none. I'd rather be out even in the cold an do wot I come fer."

"What did you come fer?" she asked.

He had spoken without thinking and he looked away. "Gee-uh-uh-uh I can't think o' nothin' but that Injun wot shot me. I got lots to do that an I'm goin' to do it."

"You didn't come to the mountains to get him," she said, with slow emphasis. "Why did you come?"

¹ Blue Pete, Half-breed.

² The Vengeance of Blue Pete.

"Joe Blue Goose heerd me tell 'wy I come"

"Who is this Joe Blue Goose?" she enquired "Blue Pete has not yet told me why he came" She did not wait for a reply but dropped the blanket into place and was gone

He seldom so much as spoke to her when hidden behind the blankets it was too much like breaking in on the privacy she sought But when next she came to him he said

"It do matter none to you missy 'wy I come huntin' or not Tain't goes to hurt you none You do needta keer nohow That's other reasons fer comin' an' maybe the Mounties cud tell yuh some o' them"

She eyed him keenly and he managed to face it A slow, sad smile spread over her face "I'll remember that I don't want to know now"

He felt mean about it and he could not understand why It was nobody's business but North Wind's why he was there

That night two men entered the cabin after dark and dropped loads on the floor Almost always the woman spent the day alone but at night a man was always there leaving early in the morning It did not surprise Blue Pete since there was nothing to do in the foothills but hunt Always there was fresh meat of some kind By the sounds, too, he could follow the progress of curing skins and often frames, with the stretched furs, leaned against his window

Able now to hobble about he never went near the window when the Indian was working outside It was no concern of his that they should act as they did, so long as they remained the good friends they were As friends he must respect their wishes

The time passed when he felt that he might leave The splints had been removed, and the bones appeared to have set well A few days of gentle exercise would be wise before facing the outdoors

The fact that it was now the dead of winter appalled him none There were always satisfactory refuges in the wilds for an outdoor man like himself and he had no fear of the snow or the cold He hoped, too, that he might still be able to make use of the Indian encampments of other tribes than Mountain Streams though he knew that was problematical it depended on Mountain Streams' feelings toward him He had really done nothing to avert the chief's enmity

except to wish to be free. He forgot the shot he had fired over the heads of the Indians as they set out after him, it had no evil intent, and should not count. If they knew how he had again saved Mountain Stream's life they would welcome him still as a friend.

At any rate, he had a job to do, and to do it he was prepared to face every risk.

One thing troubled him—he had no idea what had happened to Joe Blue Goose, or where he was, and in the Blackfoot lay his one hope of success within any reasonable time. Every time he wondered if Joe had had anything to do with his rescue he remembered that the woman appeared to know nothing about him. Even if she were trying to deceive him he did not feel that it would be sporting to pick up the Blackfoot's trail from the cabin where he had helped to bring him.

Bluntly he tackled the subject.

"Will yuh tell Joe Blue Goose massy, I wanta see him?"

As usual she frowned, and shook her head. "Who is Joe Blue Goose? You have never told me. Was he with you? Is he a friend?"

"I shure hope he's a friend," he muttered. But he gave it up, though he was not quite convinced.

"Day after tomorrow I'm packin' muh freight," he announced.

She appeared not to understand, and he explained. "I gotta git gone! I mean."

"But it's winter," she protested. "You do not know what winter is here in the mountains. You wud lose yourself and freeze to death."

"I gotta git movin', massy. Yuh didn' think I was campin' on yuh the hull winter, didja?"

"There is room," she said. "But you gotta go—to do what you came for." She sighed.

"Never was so long under a roof at one time in muh life," he granted, ignoring the implied question. "Rather sleep outdoors any weather, a most. I'm useta it. Winters I ain't slept unde a dozen times. Thar's lots o' snow here to crawl into. I know how to use it to keep warm. I won't freeze."

"And you have your job to do," she repeated pointedly.

"Shure! I gotta find that Notbe-Injun, I mean, the one wot shot me." The contemptuous term for her race had slipped from him.

She sighed, and left him. But in a few minutes she was back. "You please talk not like that to anyone else. They know you not Indian then. Next time we perhaps not find you in time."

He puzzled about her—how she knew so much about him. Was it that he had talked while unconscious or had Joe Blue Goose told her? The temptation was strong to wait around until the Blackfoot left a trail from the cabin for him to follow.

CHAPTER XXVI

ON THE JOB AGAIN

WHEN the time came to leave the cabin, seven weeks of inaction and soft living—soft compared with the strenuous life he had always lived and preferred—had made him a little doubtful of the future. Eager as he was to get into the open life and to get on with his job, the absence of a definite line of action affected him strongly, and made him uneasy. There was too the winter the squaw had spoken of. He even found himself doubting the completeness of his recovery—the strength of the injured arm and leg.

A sense of obligation—of a debt he could think of no way of paying—added to his discomfort. It brought more persistently to his mind the mystery of the Indians who had done so much for him. That they should not wish him to be able to describe them—perhaps unconsciously—to those who sought to do them harm was reasonable enough. In his own mind he decided never to speak of them.

A few days before he left he knew by the sounds beyond the blankets that something disturbing had happened. It was early in the morning and he was not yet quite awake. Dozing and too comfortable to waken to a cold world he heard the outer door open, and a moment later a grunt of surprise and anger. The Indian woman hurried to the door, and she too, exclaimed. Something of unusual concern to them had occurred.

Blue Pete was wide awake now. By certain sounds he knew that someone was floundering through the snow, making a circuit of the cabin, and without snowshoes, puffing with the effort, and muttering curses.

The door opened and an excited, whispered conversation took place.

The blankets parted and the woman came through. Without a word she picked up the half-breed's snowshoes, snatched apologetically, and started to go.

He nodded. "I know. That skunk's been here and snatched his snowshoes. He trawled. But I gotta hev that pair muh-ah! I'm gunn now any day. No. I'll get out today. Lemme get that skunk. I kin track him down an I'm ready to pay him back fer a lot o' things he done. I'll pick up another pair somewhere an bring em back fer yuh. Honest I will."

What had happened was evident. The snowshoes always left in the sled outside the cabin that the moose hung on and some might not not the gut and wary the frame had been stolen. Where snowshoes were an absolute necessity, it was a disastrous crime. They were as invaluable as a cache of food for a hunter or a tent for a disaster trap-line. In the law of the open spaces such a crime was punishable by death.

To Blue Pete it seemed not such a hardship, such a scrupling but a necessity. With his own snowshoes he would take up the trail of the robber or steal another pair from one of the camps. The ethics of helping himself where there were many other pairs meant nothing, especially when the owners were Indians. Indians would rob him if his eye teeth if they could get away with it. Of course he would never think of taking a pair from an isolated cabin such as this.

The woman did not put the snowshoes back. "There's a trail," she said. "He did take it."

"Yeah an catch up to him with a bullet in his heart. I know them skunks. Lemme do it. I've had a lot to do with em before an this one's my job. He got me once, he'll never get the chance agin. He knows wuzur II trail him an he'll be waitin with some more o' the bullets that got me. I owe that sorta thing. He won't be expectin me so I got a better chance."

She shook her head stubbornly. "We didn't keep you here to let you get shot again. You gotta be careful a lot yet. There'll be new snowshoes in a couple days. We got the gut and the frames. It just happened his spare pair was out there too because he had broke through the ice and wet his best pair."

"Then wait till the new ones are made," urged the half

breed. "It ain't safe jes' yit." He saw the danger more clearly than they did. Besides, he knew who the culprit was and that was a job for himself alone.

Nothing he could say changed their decision. The snowshoes were taken, and he heard the swift "crunch" of her companion setting out after the thief.

A few hours later part of his fears were justified. The outer door opened and someone staggered in, breathing heavily and stifling a groan. The clatter of the snowshoes on the floor showed that the wearer had not even stopped to remove them outside.

'Is he bad, missy?' Blue Pete called out.

She was too busy to reply. But later she came to him.

'It is not serious,' she said. But her face was deeply lined, and her eyes were troubled as she leaned weakly against the wall.

"The bullet was aimed at his heart, but it struck a button. It has torn the flesh, that is all."

She stumbled back through the blankets. Later she returned with the snowshoes.

"Here they are," she said. "But I will give them to you only when you promise not to go out after him—not now."

Blue Pete's teeth bared. "It's another count agin him. Fust thing I know I'll be fergittin' wot I come fer."

Her head raised sharply. "What was that?"

He had never before been so tempted to tell her, and his lips had parted to speak before he regained control of himself. He shook his head.

"Yah ain't intrusted, missy. I can't tell on mahself," he added, suggesting some lawlessness that had better be forgotten.

She sighed, and left him. But in a moment she was back. "You didn't promise."

He grinned. "I won't go fer a day or two, I promise. I'll need a good arm an' a good leg fer wot I gotta do—to that skunk."

When the time of his departure arrived he was dumb. He had no word of thanks, his idea of gratitude was of something that demanded action, not words. To put how he felt into words would have embarrassed him painfully. One did things for others not to be thanked, but from a natural

impulse or desire, words of thanks only made gratitude artificial or mercenary. But the sense of obligation to the woman was keen.

Disliking the Indians as he did, the care she had taken of him accused him. Only of late had he thought to distinguish between individuals. Now he knew he should be fair and isolate his hatred. If only he could have conveyed something of that to the squaw as she stood in silence watching him work his heels into the thongs. On his feet were the cosy moccasins she had made for him. Behind him he was leaving a cabin where he had been comfortable for the longest stay in his life under cover. But he could not speak. All he could do was to hope that some day he might be given the opportunity of doing something for them. Until then he would never speak of them to others.

He fumbled with the thongs, and at last he found his tongue.

"I'll shore come back some day, mossy. I won't forget."

He waved to her and was off, hurrying to hide himself and his feelings in the forest. He was strangely unhappy about it all. Her lonely life, the isolation of it, the danger that surrounded her and her companion were personal misery to him.

He did not slacken his pace until he was well out of sight and lost in the snowclad forest. Yet he seemed to feel her eyes on him, still standing where he had left her, pretty, lonely, kindly.

Suddenly his eyes fixed on a snowshoe track before him and he saw that unconsciously he had followed the trail made by the squaw's companion. He turned abruptly away from it, lest he should be tempted stumbling blindly along, his snowshoes catching in snow-covered boughs and low brush.

It was a dull day, and after a time the mountains at his back seemed to press down on him, weighing on his spirits, almost frightening him. He remembered miserably that he had nowhere to go. There was no danger of losing himself. He had lived too long in the wilds for that to happen. But where should he go?

He felt lonesome without a friend in the world into which he was once more entering. He had his job but it had still no starting point, and threatened to have no end. All the weeks of his inactivity had failed to produce a plan beyond

the one he had had from the time he saw Joe Blue Goose with Mountain Stream's followers. During his illness he had thought only of getting out.

Brushing the snow from a fallen tree, he seated himself to think things over. But nothing presented itself that was promising beyond what he had had in mind. Joe Blue Goose, always Joe Blue Goose, and nothing else. But so far everything had massed to defeat him there.

With a sharp breath he rose. He would not be defeated, he would find the Blackfoot.

It meant that he must wait at the Indian encampments until he found where Joe made his headquarters. Once he found him he would never lose sight of him.

Given any sort of chance, trailing was easy for him. But heretofore the trail had always led to an enemy. Now it must lead to a friend, and that was different. It required a different approach, a different technique. He was not certain that he was fitted for that.

The greatest obstacle was the uncertainty of his standing with the Indians. Mountain Stream, while not exactly an enemy, would certainly not be friendly to one who had walked out on him in the night. And that feeling was likely to spread to the other camps. At the best it meant trouble and delay.

The place to start to find the Blackfoot was obviously Mountain Stream's encampment. As a friend of the chief's the Blackfoot was sure to be there sooner or later. Some sort of understanding between them seemed to ensure that. To start there, too, would quickly show where he stood with the Indians, and that he should know as soon as possible.

That night he spent none too uncomfortably under the bank of snow that had massed on the deadfall in the timber burnt blaze. Many a night he had spent like that, and he knew what should be done. He and Inspector Barker had exchanged reminiscences of such winter nights, for the Inspector had been through it all in his earlier years. Once he had snowshoed for two months on the trail of an Indian woman who had killed her papoose. Every night he had been forced to sleep in the snow. Such experiences had given him the rugged constitution he now possessed.

In the open it was close to zero, but the heat of the half-breed's breath and body actually melted the snow in places,

and brought drops of chilling water on him from the matted branches overhead.

He had timed his arrival at the encampment for the early morning. He wished to be there when the braves started on their trip. Now, at that time he would be sure to see Joe Blue leave. He was in the camp for every Indian was out to see the trappers leave.

In the early light he struck northward seeking the beaten trail he knew would be there. It was the one way to cover his own trail. He found what he sought, the route the trappers followed from the camp. But it was narrow for the Indians went in single file. Their snowshoes were made narrow to get through the trees, while the ones he wore were wider, more useful for open ground. It meant that he had to be careful to avoid leaving telltale marks. It invited him to get a new pair when the opportunity offered. There were places on the trail where he was forced to tilt his snowshoes sideways to get through the trees. The wider snowshoes would hinder him too if he had to run for it in the thicker parts of the forest.

The camp was already awake and in movement when he came within sight of it. The greatest care was necessary then or the dogs would give him away. To keep the camp in sight and be unseen himself he must find some place close enough to the trail to reach it without leaving a mark in the snow. Obviously it meant climbing a tree, one he could reach from the trail.

Such a hiding place was not difficult to find for close to the camp the trail wound through a thick forest. An overhanging branch offered what he sought as he leaped to it and drew himself up. Even then he must be careful, for most of the boughs of the trees about him were covered with snow and fresh snow shaken on the other snow would catch the eyes of the Indians and warn them that something was in the tree.

The tree he chose was a thick evergreen into whose branches the snow seemed to have failed to penetrate and he forced his way up into the thick green and commenced to climb.

CHAPTER XXVII

A MOUNTAIN LION

HE was just in time. A line of Indians moving at a jog-trot along the trail from the encampment. They had perfected the knee-limbed movements that makes snowshoeing so untruing even to undeveloped muscles, and covers incredible distances in a day.

Blue Pete fixed his eyes on them, studying every figure as it came up. Wight, fearing that he might still be seen, he reached up without looking and caught hold of a higher branch to draw himself farther from the trail.

The tree was perfect for his purpose. It was not so thick as to prevent him looking, and about it clustered three thick evergreens that screened him everywhere except straight before his eyes toward the encampment, and in one spot over the trail.

The Indians were unlikely to raise their eyes at that particular spot for it would be almost directly over their heads, yet he would be able to see them plainly as they passed beneath.

He felt unaccountably uneasy nevertheless, and almost unconsciously he released his feet from the thongs and fixed the snowshoes in a crack in the tree. His rifle slung by a strap from his left shoulder, and held steadily in his left hand, was ready for almost instant use, yet he could not imagine any situation where he would require it. An uncomfortable feeling as if there were new danger took hold of him, and he gripped the rifle more firmly with his left hand, leaving his right free for his legs.

At the time the Indians came nearer. At the head of the line was Mountain Stream, coming along with a powerful stride. He too appeared uneasy, for his eyes kept flitting about, and his rifle was held in his right hand across his chest. In the group behind him was no sign of Joe Blue Loons, and Blue Pete frowned with disappointment.

Suddenly his skin seemed to creep. It was an intensification of the sense of danger on which he had always relied. He tried to blame it on the recent weeks of soft living and inaction, and he upbraided himself. It angered him.

It could not be that any immediate threat came from the

Indians, certainly not of the sort that justified the way he felt. The Indian bark rubber? He did not think so but he did peer about into the nearest trees. However, the fellow would not dare do anything in the face of the approaching lion.

To shift his position he reached for a still higher branch and raised his eyes.

What he saw sent such a chill of dread through him as he had never felt before, so overpowering that he almost released his hold.

Lying across a branch only a few feet above his head, its clear yellow eyes fixed gloatingly on him, the red nose quivering with excitement, was a mountain lion, or cougar. The short rounded ears were stiff and threatening, its wide haps protruded on either side of the branch, its tail with the dark tip, waved almost hypnotizingly back and forward. The muscles beneath its sleek tawny coat rippled as the claws of the brute seemed to feel for a stouter base from which to spring.

He had shot cougars before, but always as nothing more than an incident in a hunt where he had all the advantage. This was different, so vastly and upsettingly different that he felt for the moment as if he had never seen such a beast before.

And in the first instant he recognized that it was prepared to spring.

He wondered why it waited so long, yet vaguely he knew the reason, the impertinence, the defiance of anything in the shape of an animal daring to climb boldly toward it unsettled it for the moment. It did not understand. Generations had established its belief in its kingship over every other animal. Man it had learned to fear, but only under conditions that did not exist here. Generations had established an undying hatred of its on-time man, and here was its chance to express that hatred.

All the time Blue Pete had climbed cautiously, to make as little noise as possible, but always he had climbed closer and closer to the brute, as if he did not fear it. So far that had been his salvation.

His mind acted quickly. His rifle was in his left hand, but it did not point, and his right hand had not yet reached his .45. Swift as he was on the draw, he knew that to make the slightest move would bring that great tawny body down on him, with slashing claws that would rip him apart with

one stroke—one hundred and eighty pounds of vicious fury even if he managed to get a shot as it leaped.

He stiffened. He forgot the Indians; in all the world was nothing but himself and that pair of glowing yellow eyes. Never before, even when hurtled had he felt so helpless, so bereft of any means of defense. How naked in the very immensity of the danger he kept his eyes fixed on the puma's frown and the slow uncoiling of the long tail, that the light and darkness was the end. He realized that. He wondered how long he had to live, why such agony if was soon passed. He thought of his gun, but even a bullet the size of the brute's heart at such a close range would not save him.

He gazed out now, why the tree was near of course or was it that the cougar had chosen the tree for the same reason he had. It stood close to the trail along which was bound to pass twice a day a line of unsuspecting unprepared Indians. Hungry, the puma of a big dinner had brought the brute into the camp for its meal.

His head continued to beam. He felt slightly dizzy and with flight as much as with the effect of looking upward and trying not to blink. The cougar's claws had their firm hold now, for they did not shift; it was ready to spring. The tail seemed to move more weakly and slowly, the fur quivered more rapidly.

Now, the half-breed, hanging his own position, looking for a firmer grip in the branch for his unbalanced feet. He would throw himself sideways the moment those muscles above him had leaped for the spring. It would not save him entirely, he was sure, and move swiftly enough for that, but he might escape death. His gun was useless, he needed every effort, every thought for the leap.

Thoughts of Mrs. Bashed the high ham of the Mounted Indian who would never know what had happened to him, of the job he would feel for the first time to carry through. It brought to his lips a quick breath of anger and disappointment.

A rushing explosion burst close by, it seemed to come from beside him out. With his own muscles fixed it was the signal to leap, for both the cougar and the man. He shot the high the green, the tawny brute leaped itself at him. One paw caught him as it passed. It swept down the side of his scalp and tore into his left shoulder.

Even as he fell he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CONVALESCENT

IT was three days before he regained his senses. With fumbling mind he opened his eyes and stared about. His first thought was that he was back in the isolated cabin he had just left. But a glance showed no excluding blankets. In the opposite wall was a doorway. These were different pains, too, from any he had had before.

He raised a hand to his head, and found it covered with bandages; a raging ache struck through it, making it difficult to focus his eyes.

Painfully he rolled to his back, and tried to raise himself on his left arm, as he had been forced to do during those weeks with the strange Indian woman only to find that it was strapped to his body. He groaned and relaxed.

Someone came softly and stood beside him. He stared up at a dark face and blinked. Mountain Stream. It was too unreal to believe, especially as the chief's face was wreathed in a friendly smile.

"You are better. Light us Dark?"

Blue Pete looked down on his bound arm and made a wry face. "I must be better than I thought I'd ever be. Is it - real?"

Mountain Stream grinned. "It was almost too real for you—too real to think you could come through it and live."

"What - happened? I was—I was looking for you."

The chief nodded, and turning gave a soft order to someone out of sight. There were other eyes looking for me—or for one of us. They belonged to this.

An Indian had brought forward a rack on which was stretched a large tawny skin.

"Look! Mountain Stream's eyes were quick, and his aim good. That is why Light in Dark is alive now."

It was a gorgeous skin, the glow and vividness of life retained in the preparation. A long tail that swelled toward the end to a dark mass, hung to the floor. The chief leaned the frame against the wall where Blue Pete could least his eyes on it.

"Mountain devil," said the chief, "the largest we ever saw. From there to there, moving his hand from nose to end of tail, "almost nine feet. It would weigh more than one

hundred and eighty pounds same as I do. It was a killer. We have hunted for it for years. It took our dogs, and sometimes even our colts, and twice full-sized ponies. Two of our braves have been struck down, but were saved. A child went last year—we never found what happened to him. Light-in-Dark brought him to our rifles at last. We are grateful and happy."

Blue Pete was too confused to follow it all, but he knew that he was being thanked. For what? For the greatest fright he had ever had, for lying there with a crushing pain in his head and a disabled arm? He closed his eyes and tried to remember more. And after a time the picture of the mountain lion on the branch over his head came to him. He reached out and touched the soft skin.

"It will keep Light in Dark warm on many a cold night," said Mountain Stream.

"You are—giving it—to me?" stammered the half-breed.

"It is yours."

"But—but you shot it."

"I would not have seen it had you not moved just as I came beneath the tree. It would have killed one of us before we could shoot, if it had leaped on us. One blow of those paws is all that is needed. It had acquired a taste for human blood."

Blue Pete continued to shake his head. "I was helpless. I could not have saved myself. You saved my life."

Mountain Stream sighed. "Mountain Stream is glad to be able to pay a debt. You saved me from the grizzly. You saved me when I lay wounded on the mountain side. Only part of the debt is paid."

A scowl settled on the half-breed's face. "I was careless. It cannot be that I am a great hunter—the hunter you took me to be—or I would not have put myself in such a position. I did not see the mountain devil in the tree until it was too late. I hang my head in shame."

The chief shrugged and smiled. "None but Light in Dark would have leaped so quickly. None but Light in Dark would have lived through it. The mountain devil's claws struck him, and turned him over so that he landed on his shoulder and his head struck another tree. It would have killed anyone else."

The whole scene in the tree, up to the time the cougar leaped, was before him now. He shuddered. "When did it happen?"

Three years ago. You will be all right in a week, perhaps two or three. We know how to treat wounds with our own hands. The arm is not so bad; it is the head. You will carry the mark all your life."

They had conversed in Cree, of course; the only language Mountain Stream understood, but now Blue Pete, deep in his own thoughts, muttered in English.

Get worse! Miral, think I am more a prize beauty than ever now. I get so many marks I look like a target.

Mountain Stream did not understand. Light-in-Dark is out of danger. We are glad.

With the story of his wounds complete, Blue Pete had other things to consider. He had come with the feeling that the Indians would not seek out him, though they might not be actively hostile to him. Now they appeared more friendly than ever. For their chief was just the man. It seemed to him that he should explain his sudden departure all those weeks ago.

"I had to go away," he said.

The chief's mind must have been following the same channel. We did not know the reason. When Flying Cloud escaped us we thought at first that perhaps he had killed you, for you had disappeared. He

"Flying Cloud? Who is he?

The morning after you disappeared Flying Cloud stole into one of the tents and took things. He was seen. He is the Indian who has tried to kill me and you. Perhaps he was here seeking my life. Then some of my men saw you, and took after you. They intended to do you no harm, but you shot at them."

Blue Pete remembered. No, I did not shoot at them. All I wanted was to get away. I can never stay long in any place, and I felt I had to move on. You were making me stay.

I thought never to see Light-in-Dark again," said the chief. He has been away so long. Where was he?

I was everywhere. He would never speak of the past who had been so good to him.

A hurt expression appeared in Mountain Stream's face. "I have asked for you everywhere. You were not there. No one in any of the camps had seen you. He leaned against the wall beside the fur frame, and his keen eyes bored into the hall beyond. Why did you come to us in the first place? Why are you here in the koothah?

There was one explanation that always fitted such a

quarry. There are many reasons why an Indian avoids the white people. There are many reasons why he wishes to hide among friends of his own race. There are reasons it might be dangerous for his friends to know. Surely a man must keep his secrets! The white man's laws are not our laws, but they are all powerful.

It proved its purpose. Mountain Stream spread her hands, and turned her head right or left as she will, and spoke here. There are no questions to be asked.

Sometimes he straightened away from the wall and a brown lined his forehead. You were at Red Deer. You came to us at a time I remember.

The Indians knew almost every detail of the attempted bank robbery, but it had spread quickly in the unscrupulous way of the Indian. Telegraph. Blue Peter hung his head.

I told them of the Indians who denied the bank. But they were not Indians, but had friends. They had made themselves up as Indians, not for the robbery. One escaped. He was the only Indian.

He stopped there, he must be careful. Questions would pile on him. He told the chief that the Indian who had escaped was Flying Cloud, and he might attract himself for the story had been made up in the spirit of the moment. Perhaps Flying Cloud was his name. There must be no interference with that. Perhaps he had not seen Flying Cloud to have the pretence of the Indians in the different circumstances. But he might have if they knew he had merely tried to rob a white man's house.

He did not mean from the country now, for he will know the Mounted Police will not rest until they get him, he said.

Mountain Stream nodded thoughtfully. The Mounted Police sometimes they are not friends, but the Indians are no longer what they were, and the Mounted Police are partly to blame. I am a fool but what power have I? Only what the Mounted Police permit. They are lords of us all. I am told that only a week's journey toward the setting sun will bring us where there are no Mounted Police. But that is beyond the reserve boundaries, and it is not our land. The Indians there would not like us to break us on their trap-lines.

The reference was to British Columbia, where the Mounted Police had no jurisdiction—and British Columbia was the worse for it.

"The Mounted Police," said Blue Pete, "have saved many a scalp of ours, even when they prevented us getting some of our own. The day of the buffalo is gone, and the law is here, the white man's law. . . . We have to admit that it is fair to all—though sometimes we have to flee from it."

"Yes, you flee," smiled Mountain Stream.

"There are laws we, as Indians, must obey—but we do not like them."

"That is why Light-in-Dark is here?"

With a friend Blue Pete was not a good liar. He was saved by the abrupt opening of the outer door. Someone came across the skin covered floor and stood beside the pile of skins on which he lay.

It was Joe Blue Goose.

CHAPTER XXIX

MORE ENQUIRIES

THE sight of the Blackfoot brought to the half-breed's mind the Indian encampment in the cutbanks near Medicine Hat, and a wave of nostalgia swept over him. He wanted to get back—to his cattle, to Mira, to Sergeant Mahon and Inspector Barker, to the open prairie, where the only break the Cypress Hills, was like home to him. Suddenly he hated the job that had brought him to the mountains, with their cold silent immensity. The longing set up a nervous condition that worked to delay the benefit of the measures the Indians had taken to make him well. He realized that later

Joe Blue Goose's eyes bored into him, asking questions, suspicious, almost unfriendly. Tall, lithe, and straight, his dark face was stal and slightly grim.

"You have come back, Light-in-Dark," he said, in his own tongue, and at the end a slight lifting of the voice asked why.

Blue Pete jerked a thumb toward Mountain Stream. "They brought me back—like this."

"Yes, I have heard. You are lucky. It is the largest panther they have ever seen—a man-killer. They have hunted it for years, their children have feared to enter the forest. But you were always lucky. Take care lest it may not last."

It was a warning Blue Pete could not fail to understand, but he ignored it. I was careless. Perhaps I might have shot the panther but it would have gone worse with me."

The Blackfoot's eyes seemed to harden. "What were you doing in that tree?"

It was a question the half-breed could not answer honestly with safety, particularly to the man most intimately concerned. He evaded it.

"I have been long away and it is not well to live too long alone. I do not like the mountains. I do not like the winter here. It is not what I am used to. I remembered the comfortable hut they gave me here and I wanted to return."

"Why did you leave it?"

Blue Pete made a grimace. "I am a wanderer, I can never stay long anywhere. All my life I have moved from place to place. My friends here thought I would stay with them all winter and I could not face so long a time in one spot. That is why I left. I went by night because I did not wish to hurt their feelings."

Joe Blue Goose continued to stare into his eyes, and for a time he said nothing more. Suddenly he spoke. "There was another Indian here the night you left. Flying Cloud is no man's friend here. He has tried to shoot Mountain Stream, and

He has tried to shoot me too," Blue Pete broke in.

"When was that?"

The half-breed had been thinking of the shot through the cabin window when he lay helpless, but he dare not speak of that. That first shot fired at them as they rode northward toward the home camp they still thought to have been aimed at Mountain Stream.

"The day I climbed to save Mountain Stream," he replied in English. "You remember?"

The Blackfoot's brow was furrowed with doubt. "You are not his friend? You have had nothing to do with him?" He spoke still in Blackfoot.

"I will some day," promised Blue Pete, gritting his teeth. "Flyin' Cloud's gotta settle th me for lots things."

"Is it that—that you ran from him—here?"

The half-breed scowled angrily. "Yuh astin ef I'm afeerd o' him?"

The Blackfoot glanced about, and leaned nearer. "They will think your story about him is not true—perhaps. Flying

Cloud is a rogue, they have sworn to kill him. He shot at their chief."

"Are you sure it was him he wanted?"

"Who else?"

Blue Pete was not prepared to tell what he knew. "Some day I'll kill Flyin' Cloud myself," he said with a finality that could not be mistaken.

The Blackfoot appeared convinced. "I ask because they will not ask you, they will ask me. They have accepted you as a friend and it closes their lips. But there are things you might tell them that would make them sure of you."

It was a temptation. To tell everything might leave him free to get about, but almost certainly it would make them cold to him. But this persistent questioning irritated him. He fought back the temptation in time.

Flyin' Cloud, he repeated. "I some day pay me th his life. I promise yuh that an Mountain Stream. Am't that nuff? Soon I'm well. The nagging memory of the job he had first to do closed his lips for a moment. "I'll get him, some day," he ended weakly.

The eyes of the Blackfoot continued to bore into him. "Some day? You have something else to do first. Is that it? You have not come to the mountains to hunt."

"I've come to the mountains to hunt," replied the half-breed, and he was able to say it with conviction, for it was the truth.

Joe Blue Gasser failed to catch the double meaning. "I am satisfied," but Mountain Stream and his men must be satisfied too. "I will tell them what you have told me. They may believe. There was doubt in his tone."

Blue Pete saw how serious it might be, and he raised himself and leaned against the wall. In the open doorway Mountain Stream's athletic figure stood out clear against the sky. Cold as it was, the heat from the stove burning fiercely in the corner sent a pleasant, comfortable warmth through the room. Out beyond the door a group of interested Indians clustered, they seemed to be waiting for something.

Tell Mountain Stream that, he said. Flyin' Cloud's as much his enemy as mine. Flyin' Cloud's tried to kill him often as he knows. That's why they found him here the morning I vanished. I left him knocked out in my hut, for I punched him good right out that sore that very cabin,

when he was getting ready to shoot Mountain Stream again. I didn't know who he was. It was dark and all I thought of was his gun and my canoe. I needed him to get away.

Joe Blue's eyes glinted with excitement. He was — "very right in the camp."

Right at that instant, at this very door, I let him have it, then I carried him to my hut. Mountain Stream was tight asleep. I could hear him snore. He didn't wake up. All I wanted was the shield the shunk carried. I had to take him from him or risk a hurt somewhere. I didn't want to steal from friends. I didn't guess within till I was well away. That was why I came back and they need me. I was after Flying Cloud when they need me. That's all.

The Blackfoot called on Jodis to Mountain Stream, and told him the story. The chief listened to the end with stolid face, one hand sitting on his hip. When the story was told he leaned over the hall bench, his hand extended.

"It is another tale we see Light-in-Dark," he said gravely. "He is more than a friend now, he is a brother whatever happens. We will hunt together, we will never be separated."

The suggestion of a smile crossed the face of the Blackfoot as he listened.

Blue Pete nodded it. "We are friends, yes," he replied slowly, "but but we cannot hunt together for I cannot stay."

A frown lined Mountain Stream's forehead, but he said stilly, "It is as a brother wishes. But if he does not wish to remain . . ."

"He is a wanderer," the Blackfoot broke in, "like myself. He will be going away, perhaps from the foothills. He watched the hall bench's face as he spoke.

"It was Mountain Stream who broke the silence that followed. "In the winter we cannot wander, it is not safe. If he will stay we will set off together after this Flying Cloud. We will never rest till we get him, for we cannot be safe till he is killed. I and my people would hunt in peace, but that is not possible with Flying Cloud alive."

Blue Pete looked away, he could not face them. A soundless clasp he shook the Blackfoot's body. The hall bench gulped with embarrassment.

"Mountain Stream, the great chief and hunter," he said, "is my friend, as he says. That is why I do not fear to ask a favour, just one, a favour it is easy for him to grant."

"What would Light-in-Dark wish?" asked the chief.

"That he leave Flyin' Cloud to me. I would hunt him alone. It was I he shot at first. It is I he wishes to kill most, for he hates me as he never can hate Mountain Stream. I killed his friends. Twice he shot at me before he had reason to hate Mountain Stream, therefore he is mine to punish. If I fail, then Mountain Stream may try. He may shoot faster and straighter."

"Is that why Light-in-Dark does not wish to winter with us?"

Joe Blue Goose's teasing smile was fixed on him, awaiting his reply.

"It is—one reason," declared the half-breed.

"There are others." With us Light-in-Dark is safe. The Mounted Police will not get him here; they have not been here for two years. If they came we could hide him. We always know when they are near."

There is another reason. Blue Pete admitted.

Mountain Stream nodded, waiting.

"There is another, 'yes,'" said Joe Blue Goose softly in his own tongue.

The half-breed shrugged, but said nothing, and the other two turned away. Neither was satisfied, and Blue Pete knew it. Indeed, he had only confirmed the Blackfoot's suspicions, and it worried him, so that he became silent and almost sullen. It delayed his recovery.

So closely was he kept to the hut that he fancied that once more he was little better than a prisoner, and finally he could bear it no longer. Joe Blue Goose had never come near him again, and he knew that from now on the Blackfoot would deliberately keep out of his way.

He was surprised, therefore, when his Blackfoot friend suddenly appeared again. Someone came to the door of the cabin. First inside Blue Pete could hear him removing his feet from the snowshoe thongs and stamping to free his moccasins from ice and snow. There had been no storm for several days, and paths were worn all through the camp. By the very fact that his visitor had come on snowshoes he knew he had come a long way. He was alone at the time, and he trembled with excitement.

The door pushed open, and Joe Blue Goose entered. The half-breed was on his feet, his eyes fixed on the door when it opened. Through the opening he could see the snowshoes stuck in the snow, and a vagrant thought made his eyes drop.

Joe Blue Goose noticed it, and reread it. He smiled.

"The mountain devil paid too much for so little," he said.

"You will be well in a week or two."

"I darn well gotta be," growled Blue Pete in English.

"Must it be in English?" asked the Blackfoot. "You wish to speak that they cannot understand?" He, too, spoke in English.

"No, oh, no! I jes' wanta 'member how to talk w'en I git back home."

"You are going soon?"

Blue Pete saw that he would have to be more careful.

"I ain't in no hurry. I'm goin' back in the spring, o' course."

"You said you gotta get well quick, but you do not say why."

Blue Pete scowled. "Le's not git goin' over all that ag'in, Joe. Do' matter to nobody here. Yah're allus astin' w'y I'm here. I ain't ast you w'y not yet."

"I come see you," replied the Blackfoot, with exaggerated innocence.

"Yuh're in the foothills, same's me. It do' matter to me none w'y. I wanta do a bit o' huntin'. You n' me, we cud hunt together. I'm near fit fer it right now. Whar'd I find yuh w'en I'm out?"

Joe Blue Goose dropped his eyes to his moccasins as he stamped to free them from a speck of snow. "I wander—same's you. I ain't got any place to stay. I walk everywhere—here, there."

Blue Pete did not follow it up, but he saw that this was intended to be a farewell, from now on, if the Blackfoot could manage it, their paths would never cross.

"I go now," said the Indian.

Blue Pete went with him to the door, opened it, and passed through first. He drew the Indian's snowshoes from the snow and looked them over, nodding with approval.

"Most good's mine, wot I took from Flyin' Cloud," he commented.

As Joe Blue Goose swung across the open space toward the forest, Blue Pete smiled.

"Can't git 'way from me now, Joe," he muttered, and went inside.

CHAPTER XXX

A NARROW ESCAPE

A WEEK later desperate in his impatience, he removed the bandages himself. Mountain Stream entered in the midst of it and frowned.

"Light in-Dark would leave us," he asked. "We are sorry."

"It is pleasant to be with friends," Blue Pete returned, "but my home is far away. I have been away from it too long, I would return."

"But not till." You said there are reasons for being here. Your lips are sealed. I would not ask. The lips of a brother may remain sealed: if he wishes it so. But in protest he swung stiffly about and left the cabin.

That day Blue Pete bade the Indians good-bye. They gathered to see him go, silent, puzzled slightly morose in their failure to understand.

Mountain Stream stalked up to him and placed a hand on either shoulder. "Whatever you do we will always be friends. When you have done it the cabin door is open for you. We will take good care of Light in-Dark's pony as if it were our own."

"I will be back," Blue Pete promised. He knew he would be: there was still Flying Cloud to settle with. But he left mean and ungrateful. It was not that he had told them nothing: not even that he still passed as an Indian; but that he had so misjudged them as a race, linking them all with the Indian r-guns he had known.

Swinging over the snow in the bright sunlight, he felt more himself, and for a time he raced along drawing in long draughts of tingling air, now and then whistling unmusically. After a time the exaltation passed, and he stopped to think things over.

He remembered then that he had no destination in mind, not even a direction. All he could do was wander about—hoping, trusting to luck. He had his health back, his keen eyes and ears, his strength and his guns, and they had always been sufficient. But never before had he been at such a loose end. Things had gone badly with him from the beginning. Injuries he had suffered before, but never so many in succession, never so delaying and inopportune.

He drew his leg from his belt and looked at once fondly but the gun had not entered his neck, solely where it was most needed. That was a matter of time, and he was apprehensive—yet never where had time lasted—be it rather than handcuffs were some other—left him and he was left in speed and accuracy. That gun had lasted him was a personal hope, and his laughing mouth refused to understand.

He explained the gun and turned thoughtless against a small tree about which the leaves of his shoulders passed without touching his feet. A groan drew suddenly from a shoulder about. He might have looked to his belt and the shot rang out. The belt is open, flattened over a tree in the grove and he was left for him.

A smile passed over his face. He had freed from the gun, yet he had known from such where the bullet would go. To prove it he pulled the belt up. The bullet had passed through its neck. With a satisfied grin he using the found claws through the strap of his gun and the belt on.

For a long time he walked without any sign of intention so that when at last he looked about to make himself he found that he had some serious pains sustained. Somewhere back in his mind must have been the thought that his new hope of having the King's name was to visit the other equipments. The Blackbird must sleep at one of a third of them. It never had, he was he must visit them sometime.

He looked to prove the way he had made. He could not be far from the next equipment room, and he had started with Mountain Streamers their true northwest. Mountain Streamers from today would ensure him a welcome of work, and he carried from it more more than ever.

Never a shot or was found to join the Blackbird's train, and when he found it he would never stop until he knew if it would lead him off Ward. The mountain would not be likely to live in a regular camp—he had come to that conclusion since the Mountain Police were apt to drop in unannounced at any time.

As he went along he shot three more grouse though not after failing managed to escape somewhere under the snow. Angered by his failure to find it he watched longer than it was worth.

He entered the campground however with three fat grouse as his contribution to the food that would be provided him.

It was sundown as he strode through the huts. It was, he recalled now, a filthy place, but with the snow piled everywhere its ugliness and filth were concealed. Even Mountain Stream had not remained longer than was necessary to give point to his friendliness. Now the snow was laid and the huts were crissed and tightened against the cold and every door was closed, covering the door let within.

It was the dogs that saw him first and a low growl barking broke out. It announced his arrival and the cabin doors opened to let the Indians come pouring out. They eyed him warily as he passed, waiting to be satisfied as to whether he was friend or foe.

They recognized him at last and in their welcome he read that his recent ship, with Mountain Stream, served him well.

One of the men disappeared at a run and in a few minutes the coat appeared, brushing stuffs through the snow, a hastily donned garment, draped over his shoulders. The others were seated as if in waiters. He passed his hands on the half-breed's shoulders and granted then he leaned forward until the top of his head almost touched Blue Pete's face. The odour of unwashed hair made the half-breed's lips close tightly.

Light in dark is welcome as the full moon, rested the chief in Cree, as the flowers of spring, as the season of plentiful fur."

With partly near covers the half-breed, muttered the half-breed in English. He was embarrassed, not so much by the frequency of the welcome as by the constraint he was forced to put on himself to keep from spitting in his disgust. He longed to take the fellow by the collar and shove him into the snow, the nearest to a bath he had had in months. He managed, however, to grant his thanks.

The mountain deer he helped to kill, said the chief, "has taken many of my coats and my dogs. We too have hunted him long."

'Yah ameh, stank.

Blue Pete commenced in English. He went on in Cree. "I did not help to kill it. Mountain Stream shot straight and true when I was helpless. But he had to work off some of his feelings. Not much."

"If done was jump for much life, an I help make it fast 'nuff then. An does he eat him one again yah stink weed or I'll spit in yer eye. But yah ve upped my appetite now if yah got anything I kin eat." He smiled as he spoke in

English, so that the Indians thought he was thinking them in some unnumbered old language.

The chief turned and beckoned. "Follow me Light-in-Dark. We was one a great hunter. There is good hunting here the best in the foothills better than where Mountain Stream runs his trap-lines. All winter there is fur in our traps, they are never empty. Light-in-Dark would do well to stay with us."

It looks like another trap, and the half-breed shrank from the thought of remaining in such a camp. He dare not show how he felt, however, for he had questions to ask. Close-mouthed and secretive always, the Indian has never recovered from the days of tribal warfare and Blue Pete was not of their tribe.

A hut was set aside for him, and a squaw sent to look after him. But the contrast with his white wife was almost too much for him, and he sat with his back to her when she was in the hut. As soon as he dare he dismissed her. A few minutes later the half-breed friendly now appeared, and invited him to his own cabin.

It seemed at first to be exactly what he would have asked for, but the chief's stiff manner as they ate warned him that he could be drawn from him, and it would not be wise to try. With a sigh he saw himself thrown back on his own resources once more.

During the night he awakened suddenly. No animal was it that he took it for a warning. Something was happening outside the hut, something that concerned him. He lay listening, but for a long time not a sound but the soft whisper of wind high in the trees reached him, he drew twice by the sharp rick of a frost-bowed branch. He layed again.

He awakened once more, and this time he knew he felt that someone was moving about near the cabin. Yet he heard nothing. Rising he grasped his ax and softly opened the door.

What he saw sent the blood tingling through his veins. It looked as if the whole camp was out there, and only a few yards away two beavers stood as if on guard.

Soundlessly he closed the door, and took his stand beside the door again. Yet he did not feel that he was in any great danger, and after a time he lay down again. It might be some Indian rite he did not understand. But he did not sleep, all the time he lay with his eyes glued to the door.

Still nothing happened, and at last he fell asleep.

The next time he awakened he knew that someone was at his door. Raising himself against the wall gun ready he waited. None but an enemy, he decided, would move so silently, so stealthily. He would shoot the moment the door opened and offered a target.

The door did not open and after a time he knew that he was alone again. Too deep, to be careful, he dropped back and closed his eyes.

He had not thought that he slept again, that there had been time for it, when the wooden flap covering the window space was pushed suddenly in and a handful of blazing evergreen was tossed through. It dropped to the bough-covered floor and almost before he could leap, aside the whole interior seemed to be in flames, a burning irrefragable fire.

He sprang to the door. It was fastened on the outside! Either he would be burned or smothered to death.

The mysterious events of the night flashed across his mind. Something had happened in the night to alter the feeling of the camp toward him. The movement he had heard and seen had convinced him more than he suspected, though no immediate danger threatened at the moment. That was to come later with the burning brush. Some news had surely reached the camp after he had gone to sleep, some accusation, some revelation of his identity and purpose.

All these thoughts flashed through his mind as he stood choking before the door. He did not call out. It would be useless, and he did not wish to run into a pile of guns. If he made no noise the Indians would remain motionless, convinced that he could not escape and prepared to swear that he himself must have set the fire should the Mounted Police hear of it.

But whence could help come?

He knew the door was too stout for him to break down in time and he dropped to the floor where the fumes and smoke were less dense and held his research-knife over his mouth. He had kicked the evergreen from the corner where he lay but the wheel taken up, warned now to be swift. It was the most threatening situation he had ever faced.

He could do nothing but attack the door and he jumped to his feet and started for it.

At that moment something slid along the wall outside, and the door opened. He leaped through. Someone was

running away. By the light of the fire and against the snow he could not mistake that dark figure: it was the squaw he had encountered there once. He stopped.

Turning back on the spot, he grabbed his park with thrust his feet into the thongs of his moccasins and started around the corner of the last building. He stopped and turned back, seeing a flaming log and heard an Indian's but he rushed on the verge of the nearest window in another room and, there, the burning emergency through. There was a faint light from the fire.

He felt that the Indians told him. The camp was not burning in the snow against him with a tremendous shaking from the snow he had fired. He knew somehow that the danger in these attacks toward him had little to do with the attempt on his life. Whoever was responsible for that danger had tried to burn him to death. That could only be Flying Cloud.

He knew the Indians would pick up his trail as soon as the fire left them free, but there was a lot of time, and he stood among the trees and waited. He was not certain that the flames would have killed the Indians, but he did not know, and the Indians might be able to smother them with snow.

The logs around the burning flames and the smoking emerged from their snow logouts and tumbled violently. Two of them were hit and rolled toward him, but kept their distance. In a moment of time he knew his gun and two sharp yelps announced that the Indians had gone home.

It was the dark that brought most complete action within the main camp. The Indians had now almost started but cautious Indians and those to right vanished quickly. Then the fire appeared, bounding from the last and adding to his own. The fire had been all over, and the fire was still.

Blue Fire watched it all with growing anger. Looking back he saw a shot in the air, the last of the Indians, the Indians stepped into the snow and commenced to crawl away, rising at last and lying behind the nearest hut.

Again the half-breed heard the noise at the nearest dog. It barked without a sound.

The Indians feared about the burning, about keeping as much as possible. The fire threatened to spread, and half a dozen of the leaves detached themselves and started by different routes toward him. The rest attacked the flames, keeping snow on them with their moccasins.

and with boards brought from the huts. The fire had gained no real hold on the logs, and it was quickly put out.

Blue Pete did not hurry. Almost he hoped the Indians would crowd him, giving him an excuse to shoot them. The old hatred of the race rose within him and for the moment he forgot everything they had so recently done for him. He had been so long now beyond the reach of the law that the old rustling lawlessness was on him. He longed for a real fight, to show what his *45* could do.

CHAPTER XXXI

FLIGHT

HE thought better of it before many minutes had passed, and to make certain that he was not followed too closely he turned and rounded back. His tracks would be plain in the snow the Indians would have no difficulty picking them up.

But none were in sight and, curious, he returned to his former position, where he could look in on the encampment. The Indians had started after him, but had lost heart and courage—and had returned. They had no stomach for facing a rifle that had every reason for being turned on them. From the trail they had left the half-breed saw that they had gone only a few yards into the trees. His opinion of the whole tribe dropped still farther.

The excitement had not yet died down. It continued until daylight, the men neglecting their trap-lines. A group was gathered before the chief's hut. Now and then the door opened and someone came out, another taking his place inside. Some sort of conference was taking place, restricted in its numbers by the space within. He wondered what they discussed. Were they going to take up the chase, or was it a scheme to save their own skins if what they had attempted became known?

All day he remained within sight of the camp, and all day there was much excitement. Toward dusk the camp quietened down, and the Indians filtered back to their own huts. Finally a pair emerged from the chief's hut. One was the chief himself. The other? With a startled, questioning,

unhappy from Blue Pete recognized Joe Blue Goose. The pair crossed the open square and disappeared into a hut on the other side of the camp.

Joe Blue Goose was the one who had changed these feelings toward him, the one who had thrown the burning brand into his hut. He refused to believe it. Yet he had to admit that everything pointed to such a charge. And still he fought convictions. Certainly, the Blackfoot had not been satisfied, but he had appeared to be one who could be trusted. If an Indian ever could be trusted. There was even no evidence

except for a instant that he had so much as betrayed the fact that Blue Pete was not what he pretended to be. He could not think that such a betrayal would be betrayed until the morning coming if the Blackfoot intended to betray him. Had Joe Blue Goose really understood how well of the purposes he had been so clever and undertaken what measures he could to protect an Indian woman.

He had to know that a secret. Besides, he had promised himself not to lose track of the Blackfoot again until he was convinced of his connection with North Wind. Accordingly he moved around through the forest toward the cabin into which the two men had disappeared.

It was fully half an hour before he reached a point from which he could see the back of the hut. He had been forced by the logs to use the same route both until at the point the clearing entered far back on the far side of the path. His track would be plain enough, but before the Indians could do anything he would have accomplished his purpose and be far away. Only one thing mattered now—Joe Blue Goose.

As he entered the hut he picked his way forward more cautiously. He expected that the dogs would be housed in the kennel about the camp, each in his own little barrier. There they would keep their heads down about their noses drawn and undoubtedly to sleep all the night. But their sense of smell was so strong that his scent would carry to them on the breeze. He started to turn from the camp on that side, and he advanced more hopefully.

Luck favored him. He almost stepped on one of the dogs and it greeted the meeting with a hysterical barking and yelping. It warned the warning to a series of yelping threats.

There was nothing to be lost run for it and with a muttered curse Blue Pete hurried back into the trees. He had no fear

of the dogs. He would have welcomed a chance to shoot them all, but the Indians would read the tone of the clamor and seek its origin.

Indignant again, he swung around toward the western trail. He would not give up, yet he would wait until daylight and wait where the Blackbird went. Finding a protected spot some seven hundred yards he managed to lie, not without turning the women on the side toward the trail and the wind. There he slept.

With the first daylight he was up. He had not slept well, for he was worried about the Blackbird. What was the thing he had seen, and was he its mother, the dog? Taking his stand within sight of the trail he waited. In the early morning a line of travelers got for their way, knew

Blue Peter, stopped there, and went every foot. The Blue Comet was not among them, though every able-bodied Indian in the camp appeared to be in the line, including the chief. It surely was not possible that the Blackbird was left alone.

He did, however, understand the matter.

Half a dozen dogs rushed forward to greet him, but they missed that it was unsafe to take liberties, and they started about him at a safe distance. But their manner, their behavior and insistence, showed the full breed's belief as they left their responsibility more known, because the men were gone. Suddenly he walked on. Finding three squares who were no longer he appeared vanished into light. He was no longer directed, but he knew what eyes notified his eyes, more.

Making straight for the trail he passed in the door. Until he stepped again he saw a small red bird from within. Then he heard the dog of a woman with a sound, and a scratching sound with afterwards. For a time he listened, and a grin spread over his dark face. He passed around the corner of the cabin.

What he saw there brought a burst of laughter from his lips. A square had thought to escape through the window opening, but it was too small for her and she was clinging half in half out, running at the walls and grinding with fear and pressure. Head and shoulders had squirmed through, but she had led the wall for the rest to make it. In the struggle she had torn one breast from the opening, outside her hands clanked with the wall, while from within came the plop of her hanging legs. Her head turned toward the wall behind, and a shout of combined terror and pain burst from her

His laughter increased unrestrained and noisy, and gradually her fear gave way to anger and anxiety.

He said in Cree: "You were not built for that size of girdle, my girl. I wouldn't think it ever was your size. Now let's see." He walked about her studying her judiciously. "In or out—that's the question—would you prefer to wait until you're hungry enough to slip through?"

"No one is at home," she grunted. "Go away."

The irrelevance of it tickled him, and he laughed again. "Half of you is. If anyone was back in there—it should be your husband."

Hearing him laugh so heartily, some of the squaws had come out of the huts. He beckoned to them.

"Go inside," he ordered, "and see which way she will slide through easiest. I think the biggest part is inside. I can't go in, I'm married."

With a giggle the squaws obeyed. Others, relieved of their fears, crowded about him, laughing with him. The squaw in the opening commenced to make strange movements, and at last she dropped through into the hut, taking several of the other squaws with her to the floor.

Blue Pete went around the corner and entered, blocking the group as they tried to escape. He stood before the door.

"Where is Joe Blue Goose?" he demanded.

Their eyes flitted from one to another, but they did not answer. He saw that they would not tell if they knew. He turned to the chief's squaw; she was still sprawled on the floor, puffing and groaning.

"Is Joe Blue Goose still here?" he asked.

She struggled to resurrect the dignity of her rank. "He is not."

"When was he here last? It was a test question."

"Yesterday. He left in the night."

"Where did he go? which direction?"

The squaw shook her head.

He was reluctant to believe her, but he knew the Indians well enough to see that he would learn nothing of value. His sleeping place had been close to the trail, and he could not believe that anyone could have passed without waking him, for he had not slept well. But perhaps the Blackfoot had gone during the time he was making his way back to the trail after his encounter with the camp dogs. He was not even certain that Joe Blue Goose was still in the hut, into which he had disappeared, when the dogs drove him away.

"I will look," he growled. "Stay here, all of you, till I am finished."

He knew he would find nothing, but he wished to make a nuisance of himself in the camp that had treated him so badly. He had reached the seventh hut when a stir among the sulkily watching squaws made him turn and look in the direction they were staring.

Through the trees came a lone figure on snowshoes. Just a glance, then the half-breed was off, gliding swiftly out of sight around the nearest hut. Into the forest he raced at top speed.

On the side of the fur cap of the approaching stranger he had recognized the badge of the Mounted Police!

CHAPTER XXXII

ON THE TRAIL

HE ran as he had seldom run before, as he had never run even after a breach of the law. Upset and surprised, he was in a panic. He panted with excitement before even reaching the cover of the trees, though ordinarily he could run for hours without changing the tempo of his breathing. His head buzzed with the shock of it. From a world in which he had become a law unto himself he had been tumbled back to realities. So many weeks had he been without any reminder of the law that he had forgotten it existed. He lived in a world where a man's guns and his muscle were law, the one force that mattered.

To be sure he had come to the foothills on orders from a Mounted Police Inspector, but long ago he had forgotten the source of those orders, only their tenor. He had to get North Wind, that was all, and as usual he was getting him in his own way—if at all. The Mounted Police faded from the picture in a world where law and order were at the whim of Indian chiefs—or a man's own powers. Even North Wind had changed from a murderer to someone he had to find, nothing more. His job, not the reason for it. Against North Wind he had no personal feeling.

But the glimpse of the official insignia had shocked him back to his first position, the agent of the Mounted Police,

and with it came a driving sense of hatred of neglect of consequences of forgetting Inspector Barker.

He ran. His jaw set grimly. He would not fail again. He would never rest now, not, he had found North Wind. He saw that all the time a real hatred had been growing in his mind, driving him from his real job, flying him. The back-slashes that preceded and his last hour, devouring his interests, changing the night and the one thing that should have gladdened him. From a danger of the Indians he must forget with his work was done.

And then, as usual, he became curious. At a mere glimpse of the Mounted Police dragoon he had fled without waiting to see the face beneath. Was it really a normal face from Red Deer or Edmonton or his friends, or had Inspector Barker become anxious and sent someone to search for him?

He said not a word to himself of the latter. Camouflages were hunted by the members of the detachment where the work was made, except in special cases. In this case North Wind was almost as much a stranger to the Medicine Hat detachment as many other. He said he ran down as a stranger who wanted to see him.

He remembered then that he himself was a stranger, and so was the Bear woman. And yet the Mounted Police had made inquiries about them and not even come to the camp in the foothills. That was probably due to the severe winter and the depth of the snow. His presence was discounted now, and it surely would be, he would have to keep out of the way of the Mounted Police, he dare not explain who he was now. It would get Inspector Barker into trouble, and the suspicion rested on him.

Inquiries of the men, he said, he could not disturb would surely tell him, and the Mounted Police would be curious. There would be a search for him, he said.

He had not told the man that it had not started for several days, and the trail was packed hard. He sped along a depressed and uneasy, thinking rather than seeing.

Suddenly he stopped. Suddenly was it that one of his feet was lifted, and he kept it there. His eyes widened with excitement. They were hard on the snow at the edge of the trail.

There a creature had slipped from the beaten track and had left its mark. The weaver must have stretched. A matter of inches only, but it was enough. A grin slowly split the

half breed's face. His hands clutched together. His lips parted over clenched teeth.

It had happened in an open space where the wind had pushed them on. Otherwise the stumbling movement would have dragged some stone or to dull the mark it left. Impossible to get and hence were destined.

Just Peter Lorne had gone that way.

In the moment when he had held the Blackfoot's snow-shoes in his hands in the doorway of Mountain Stream's cabin he had noted every particular. He would remember where the marks were left. Now he had found them.

He started in moving made man's sitting stiffly, desired indignation. For a long time he fought nothing more, yet he made up the Blackfoot's mind with the same. Somewhere between them was the Indian in whom everything depended where he must find where the Mountain Indian found him.

He opened his eyes and saw that the sun had darkened. He knew that in the shock of the Mountain Indian's hand prevented his looking it before. A storm was surely threatened. And a storm was the one thing that could defeat him now. Facing him that would defeat them. He was saying the words more carefully, he was saying that he was. To the north west the sky was black, but how long the storm would be delayed he could not tell to several hours.

He turned on. A nervous sense of urgency thrilled him. In part it was due to the threatening change in the weather, in part to the presence of the Mountain Indian. That was he could not effectively ignore. All such a time in the heart of winter it would have been impossible to ignore. Suppose they were waiting for him. It meant that perhaps he was would have been adequate for sending him unaccompanied into the territories of another detachment. All because he had found. The thought occurred him and he gripped his teeth together and turned on.

Mrs. Lorne. She would be anxious. She might have appealed to the Inspector to find him though she was more likely to come forward to look for him. She had done it before and with surprising 'unconsciousness'. But he could not think of her in the light of a woman such as the one that had treated him so badly. A white woman among Indians where one was so far away.

North Wind. That was all that mattered now.

Perhaps the Inspector had discovered of him succumbing, and

had handed the case over to the Red Deer detachment. Well, no one was going to rob him. Thus poor fate has job from him.

He bent his eyes to the trail and kept on. Now and then he saw the mark he sought, and it kept his spirits up. But he must hurry—hurry—to beat the storm.

The trail branched. It branched again and again as Indians left their trap lines. It was slow work then to follow the snowshoes he was after, and the sky grew darker.

Then the storm began. It was not announced by a high wind as he expected, and it caught him unawares. Great flakes drifted down, falling every break in the snowy surface. Grasping with the need for haste he pressed onward. He stopped for nothing, but the trail was quickly growing more indistinct and he could not hurry. Branching trails increased for he was in the game country now.

After a time he knew he was beaten. But he did not stop. Rather he increased his pace. The main trail was still discernible because it was sunken and hard to walk on, but individual marks were wiped out. At last he kept to it more by feel than by sight.

He could be sure of nothing now. Even the trail seemed to peter out, and he went blindly.

He could not stop, could not rest. Something inside drove him on, now over anything in snow, now striking something hard beneath his snowshoes that spoke of others having been that way. He stumbled over invisible shrubs, fell over wind-blown trees. Twice in the thick of the storm, he collided head-on with trees.

One of his snowshoes came loose as he fell. It warned him of the danger of continuing as he was. Should he break a snowshoe and so see himself he might freeze to death. A broken snowshoe would leave him helpless to move about in such a depth of snow. The thermometer too was sinking rapidly. It must be well below zero.

Finding a sheltered spot in the lee of a thicket, he stopped to make up his mind what was best to do. He had no fear for himself. He knew how to take care of himself so long as his strength lasted, and he had been in more difficult positions. Last night for instance, in that burning hut. But here he was, defeated once more. For the trail on which he had counted so much was gone. The search must commence once more from the beginning. It depressed and discouraged him.

He had been so near success, too, for he had read from the

trail he left that Joe Blue Goose was not far ahead. Had the storm held off for another half-hour he would have come within sight of the Blackfoot. That was all he required.

Defeat made him restless and impatient, reckless. Pounding less, he plunged on blind now in the thickening storm. He had to do something. The snow clogged his face and breathing was difficult except for moments when he paused in the shelter of the trees.

Standing once to recover his breath, a sound came down the wind to him. So brief and unexpected was it that he thought at first it was his nerves playing him tricks. But the blood tingled through his veins and he trusted to that. Whether of human or animal origin, a sound like that must be investigated. In such a storm it could not be ignored. He stood listening holding his breath.

In a burst of wind it came again—a call—someone in distress, in pain, someone shouting weakly, and getting weaker. Someone with little life left in him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE END OF THE TRAIL

THE half-breed cupped his hands about his lips and shouted. That ringing sound reached him again, but he knew it was too weak to be in reply. He plunged in the direction from which it seemed to come. The trees were thicker here and though it was darker the foliage above thinned the cloud of falling snow, so that he could see for a few yards about him.

Again and again that call, automatic distressing. He knew he must hurry if he would not be too late. Stopping every few steps, he kept shouting moving slowly onward, that he might not miss his way.

A shape that was not part of the trunk of a tree against which it bulged near the base came in sight a little to his right. He hurried to it.

The call he had heard had ceased now, and even as he bent over it the man dropped forward into the snow.

"Awright, awright!" he shouted. "I'm here. Keep awake, for God's sake! Yuh're freezin'."

The storm suddenly swept in, among the trees, for the moment blotting everything out. The man in the snow lay lifelessly.

His Pete dragged him to his feet. It was too dark to see the features, even had the storm been less dense, but that did not matter. The poor fellow was obviously injured and freezing to death, and something must be done for him without loss of time.

He caught the Indian by the shoulders and raised him against the tree. The movement brought a groan of pain, but the half breed was thankful even for that. It proved the injured man was still alive.

He shook him fiercely, trying to revive his circulation, he slapped his face and pounded him on the body with one hand while he jerked him erect with the other. Then he saw that something had happened to his left leg, for it hung crookedly. Again and again he slapped and pounded, saving the leg as much as he could.

The growling grew louder. Blows had commenced again to course through savage veins.

But they could not remain there. The injured Indian must be taken somewhere for warmth and treatment. The cold would get him before long, no matter what use was done for him. But where was the nearest camp? He knew the answer, even as he asked himself, it was too distant for him to hope to get the fellow there in time, even if the journey were possible in such a storm.

For hours he had come along with no sense of direction or location. He had followed a trail, only the end of it material. It had led directly away from the camps. Before it was nothing but wildest forest and mountain.

He looked anxiously about. Where was he? He knew he had come westward, nothing more, every mile of it farther and farther from help.

A fallen log lay close by. In its cover of snow an indentation. Someone had seated himself there long ago, though later storms had done their best to level the covering. Something familiar about it, and his eyes bored into it.

He remembered then. He himself had sat there the day he left the shelter of the hut where the Indian woman had nursed him so well. The hut then could not be far away. His heart leaped with relief and hope.

'Awright mster awright,' he muttered. 'I'll git yuh thar, an' thar ain't no better place thar side home. Come on,

It had become noticeably colder. The mist from his breath had frozen about mouth and eyes and nose making his eyelids stiff and his hands numb—so numb that he dare not release his hold on the Indian to clear the frost from his face. An almost irresistible desire to stop and rest warned him that he would not last much longer. In that desire he knew was the forerunner of lying down to freeze comfortably to death.

A dim square of light broke suddenly through the mist of the storm. Automatically he reached toward it and the Indian slipped from his shoulder into the snow. He was too far gone to raise him again, so he clutched at his shoulders and backed toward the light, dragging him through the snow.

Without knocking, he opened the door and stumbled inside.

For several moments he could see nothing but the dazzling light. His head whirled, he swayed—and slumped to the floor in a heap.

He did not lose consciousness. The squaw was there standing before the stove, staring at him, and at the Indian lying beside him. Someone else was there but he ducked out of sight behind the curtain of blankets. That must be the Indian companion he had never seen. Blue Pete rolled to his side, turned away from the blankets. He did not wish to see, it was none of his business.

The squaw ran forward and dropped to her knees beside the unconscious Indian. Blue Pete raised himself to his elbow.

"I found him," he said in English. "This was the nearest place to bring him. Yuh done so much for me. I knowed yuh wold mind. An' he needs it more'n I did. Got suthin' wrong th' his left leg an' he was most froze to death. He—"

He stopped blinking his crooked eyes. The squaw had not been listening; she was calling out in Blackfoot.

"Joe! Joe Blue Goose! What happened to you?" She turned toward the blankets. "Come quick!" Suddenly she clapped her hands over her lips and stared fearfully at Blue Pete.

He lay blinking at her, doubting his ears. Joe Blue Goose! He looked at the Indian on the floor. It was his Blackfoot friend. Or was he a friend? And the squaw knew him. But that did not surprise him, for he had suspected that the Blackfoot might have told her his name.

He clambered to his feet and went to stand over them.

Suddenly he wheeled to face the curtain. He understood now. He had come to the end of the trail. Behind that curtain was North Wind, the Blackfoot he had come to take back to Medicine Hat. As a result from the accident of finding an unconscious Indian freezing, he was there in a storm.

A shudder ran through him. It was all so clear now, so distressingly clear. He closed his eyes and went to stand before the window, his back to the room. He must have time to think things over. It was all so complicated. For minutes he should have known as surely as the wildest hare that it was there. He need only drag those blankets aside and take his man. The long search was over; now he could get away from the mountains, go back home to Mira and the 3-Bar Y, and report success to Inspector Barker. A thrill of triumph flashed through him.

It passed. It was not so simple as that. It was anything but simple.

The voice of the Indian woman came from close behind his shoulder. It was soft and pleading.

"Pete," she said in English, "you know now. . . . We've known all along why you were here, but we . . ."

He whirled angrily about, pointing to Joe Blue Goose. "That's yer friend an' he needs yuh. Get in work. Don't bother beat me. He's all that matters p'sent. His legs hurt an' he's friz. Cut him away fr'm the stove till we thaw him out a bit."

He picked the Blackfoot up and set him down in a corner.

"I'll get some snow an' melt it an' put his foot in it. Cut off the moccasins an' socks. Needs tell yuh to be keeful o' the ankle. Yuh know a durn sight moore 'bout things like that 'n I do."

He glanced about the room, saw a large pail and picked it up. At the door he stopped and threw a glance toward the blankets.

"I'll jes be here here by the door. I do' want no trouble jes' yet." He opened the door and went outside.

In a few minutes he was back with the pail filled with snow. He set it on the stove to melt. His face was very grave for his mind was in a whirl. He could not think what to do in the situation in which he found himself, the contretemps into which he had blindly walked. The Indian woman was busy chafing Joe Blue Goose's hands and cheeks. A

foot was exposed, white and stiff, awaiting the cold water Blue Pete dropped to his knees beside it

"Tasn't bad's I thought," he granted. "Gummer a thick cloth. We got him in time. He s' comin' out of it."

The Blackfoot eyes opened stiffly and a low groan broke from him. He tried to raise himself, but a twist of pain sent him back to the fur rug the Indian woman had placed beneath him.

A rustle of movement brought Blue Pete swiftly about, his hand on his gun. The blankets pushed aside, and a tall Indian stalked soberly into the room and stood with bent head, his arms folded before him.

"You've caught up with me, Blue Pete," he said in awkward English.

The half-breed frowned. "Yuh both knowed all the time wot I was here fer? Yuh knowed an an yuh done wot yuh done fer me?"

A weak smile gathered in both faces, a cheerless smile. "You were hurt," said the woman simply.

Blue Pete shook his head miserably. "I got a—got a job to do."

"You were sent by the Mounties to get him," said the woman.

To the half-breed it was confusing, incredible. How did they know? For several moments he let his mind wander back over the months he had spent there in the foothills, trying to remember where he had fallen. He must have talked when he was unconscious after they rescued him.

It was a disaster, it would put an end to his work with the Mounted Police if people knew. It would tear him from his two best friends, the Inspector and Sergeant Mahon.

A coldly threatening voice broke in on them.

"It's all right, North Wind. You can get away. I'll keep him here till you're well away."

Blue Pete turned slowly. He knew what he would see. Joe Blue Goose propped back against the wall, had him covered with a gun.

Chaos and more chaos. The half-breed closed his eyes and shook his head irritably. No one had a right to confuse him so. Things were happening too fast. His mind was still fumbling with weariness and strain and with the sudden discovery he had made. Now Joe Blue Goose, the man he had thought his friend, would shoot him to free his fellow-tribesman. There was no doubt of that.

It was not that he was afraid. Guts had been pointed at him before and few had even injured him. But now to save his own life he might have to shoot a friend—and a friend of the squaw who had saved his life before. Had saved his life when she knew he was there to take her man back to pay the penalty for murder, the white man's penalty.

It was North Wind who solved the difficulty. Raising his hands, he shook his head.

"I am not running away," he said. "It would mean a lifetime of hiding. Hiding in greater loneliness than here. I won't ask Wild Flower to go on living as we've had to live. Life here that's worth nothing to her. He loved Blue Pete. Are you taking me back now?"

The half-breed sighed. "I don't know. If I don't I never talked to Inspector yet never before. He trusts me. If I do—Oh, I don't. I don't."

Wild Flower was on her feet, her flashing eyes glaring at him.

"There's a lot you don't know, Pete," she said. "There's a lot the Menominee don't know. All they know is that North Wind killed Bear Head, but they don't know why. I will tell you."

North Wind stopped quickly to her, and laid a hand gently on her shoulder. "No, no, Wild Flower. Don't come into this, please. His English faltered, but was clear. His dark head wrinkled with the effort. "I must face it alone. I killed Bear Head. The white man's law will see nothing else—and that is the law we must obey. I go back to pay."

He straightened and waited.

It was a strange scene, the four of them, three Blackfeet and a half-breed who spoke their language and all spoke English. It was their way of recognizing the force they must obey. What was happening was outside Indian rules, the Indian world.

Wild Flower stepped away from her husband, her little body held straight and stiff.

"I will speak. The white man's laws are sometimes heartless. But Blue Pete is not white, he is half of our race and he knows what is right. He will understand. If he does not, he can at least tell Inspector Barker you are not a murderer."

"By the white man's laws," North Wind began, but she waved him to silence.

Yes, she said in her own language now and her voice was sad. North Wind killed Bear Head. He killed him because he deserved to die. He died as Blue Pete would have made

him she had his own wife been attacked as I was. Bear Head was a bad man. He was always in trouble even with his own people. He made love to me. I would have nothing to do with him then. Perhaps that was why he persisted. So many women he had made love to and few had resisted him. One day I was off on the prairie picking Saskatoon berries. It was in July I believe not far from Danvers. He knew where I had gone and he followed me.

She stopped and her eyes dropped. She turned away to the stove and stood before it for a time silent and unhappy.

North Wind came after me, she said. He came just in time. He shot Bear Head. If he must pay the penalty demanded by the white man's laws it will be because he loves me, he is my husband and Bear Head was a beast. His Indian law Bear Head would have died. He knew it. But he knew the white man's laws would protect him from the death he deserved. And now you take my husband back to pay for making Bear Head pay for protecting his own wife, for taking the life of one who had to die to save me.

She had swung about to face them and her voice rang with scorn.

Blue Pete shuffled unhappily. The white man's laws may not make him pay for that.

The white man's laws demand witnesses. I had none. It would have been his word against mine and and her head dropped. There was a time when I flirted with him. It was when I thought North Wind had ceased to love me. There were witnesses to that, the Mounted Police would have found them and made them talk.

She walked proudly to North Wind and placed an arm about his neck. I never loved anyone but North Wind. If he dies I will go too. I cannot live without him.

Blue Pete closed his eyes. Persecution had been out on his forehead and he turned his back on them. Twice he walked the length of the room his great hands clashing together at his back. Before Wild Flower he stopped and looked into her eyes.

"I go now," he said. I must think. It is so hard for me. He started for the door.

She ran and stood before him her back against the door. You cannot go out in that storm.

It don't matter none, he replied dully. 'I've been in worse an' lived through 'em. I can't think here, it's too—too close

to everything, I'll come back " He glanced at North Wind. "Mebbe the hut'll be empty then."

North Wind shook his head. "I will be here. It cannot go on. I will not run away. I am tired. I cannot see Wild Flower fade before my eyes."

"It's so hard for both of us," murmured Blue Pete.

He opened the door and went out into the storm. He thrust his feet into the thongs of his snowshoes and trotted wearily into the forest.

CHAPTER XXXIV

COMPLICATIONS

THE storm had almost blown itself out, but the cold had increased to a dangerous extent. He had had little time to rest in the cabin, and the mental strain had dragged from him almost his last reserve of strength. As he ran he heard dimly the Indian woman calling frantically after him, but he did not stop.

There were moments when he thought he must be dreaming, when he pictured himself waking in Mountain Stream's camp—in the ranch-house at the Y Bar Y—in one of his caves in the Cypress Hills. He was miserable. He struggled to think things out, fighting for a solution. But he could find none. To let Inspector Barker down was unthinkable, yet he could not see himself taking back to his death a man to whom he owed his life and who had done nothing to deserve the punishment awaiting him. The Inspector would make no allowances. The law was there in black and white and the Mounted Police had a duty to carry it through to the letter North Wind had killed—that was all that mattered in the eyes of the law.

He saw it so differently himself. The dramatic story Wild Flower had told had almost made him regret that he could not himself have been at hand to exact from Bear Head the punishment he deserved, the punishment he had suffered. To give North Wind up for what he would have been glad to do himself would haunt him for the rest of his life. It would sour every job he undertook for the Mounted Police.

His muscles ached painfully. He felt himself growing stiffer

with the road and with the river. The little house had been a heavy burden on the town since the thing he had done had become a most unpleasant. And at the end of the day it was in the cotton.

[illegible]

His father said to him, "I have a new idea that if he is death, he would be able to make himself immortal by being a new man, a person who is not a human being with his blood flowing in his veins, but a new man, a new man, a new man."

On and on he staggered

It was never more than the sky had cleared and the whiteness of the snow was never more than a speckiness. He drove several hours, he said, though they lost a few days, and he returned to the little Haden town that he had come a long way toward Mount St. Helens very disappointed. It could not be far away now.

On a full moon night, a dog barked at He Li, the horse he owned, at night and the owner went the wrong way. A dog barked at night, a person said that the night was not for them, it was for the horses and the dog barked.

Struggling through the water toward the shore, he staggered and groined the pain in the chest again. He walked until he reached the shore, rolled over on his back. He only knew that he would be there until it was a few years later. Here he had been waiting for a moment. Here he was. He moved about feeling the pain that kept him from rest. He reached the door. He turned his head toward the left and pressed the door open and he found the watered floor.

He answered to find it hard to do. He lay on a pair of flaps with some people, and then he found his way out when he felt strange persons and wanted to know almost frighten. He was joined and he looked about.

Someone stood at his head bawling over him wailing. It was Sergeant Mabon.

XXXV

FRIENDS' FIGHT

BLUE PETE blinked and closed his eyes. He must be dreaming. He seemed to have been dreaming for days. So many incredible things had happened. He felt no pain only a great lassitude. Had an accident happened to him again? Had he been shot? and had they taken him back to Medicine Hat? In that case how long had he been unconscious?

And this was no room that he could remember at Medicine Hat.

He kept his eyes closed and listened. A guttural voice was speaking in free from another room. Mountain Stream. He lifted his eyelids to form a narrow slit. He lay under a window and somehow it recalled a criminal scene — of a fat squaw trying to wriggle through such a window. His face twisted in a smile.

The scene progressed to a Mounted Policeman coming on snowshoes through the trees.

He looked to where he had seen the Sergeant. Mahon was still there still smiling saying nothing.

"Yuh hadn't need to come fer me 'Sergeant," he grumbled. "I'm awright. I'm down wot."

He stopped. He had been going to assure the Sergeant that he was doing what the Inspector had sent him to do, but he wondered if that were true. He had as yet come to no decision about that.

The Sergeant moved to his side. "I'm not so sure of that, Pete."

To the half breed it seemed to be an answer to the thought he had had in his mind but had not put into words and he closed his eyes again.

"W's yu come?" he asked. He had to gain time to think — and it was still so hard to think. The three Blackfeet in the lonely cabin stood before him, their eyes appealing, asking him what he was going to do.

"We'd heard nothing about you, Pete," Mahon explained. "We were anxious. Yuh've been gone more than three months. The Inspector's in a fix. Mira too, she came in to the barracks, rode in through one of the worst storms we ever had, and told us we had to find you or she would. He bent farther over Blue Pete. "Does anyone here understand English?"

Blue Pete shook his head. "Mira knows yuh come?"

"By this time she knows I found you. I knew it was you at the camp yesterday south of here. You left just as I got there. The squaws described you so that I could not mistake you. The Inspector got permission from Edmonton to let me search for you. It wasn't necessary to tell why you were here."

"Yuh didn't needta tell me," the half-breed repeated. "This ain't no place for a Mountie. Too darn easy to get lost, an' freeze to death. Near done a freshell couple times."

"You nearly managed it last night. You were done in when you reached the camp. What happened? I never saw you tired like you were."

"Purty near got lost," murmured Blue Pete. "He was thinking of the scene in the faraway cabin. 'I do like the mountains, yuh know that. The storm got me mixed up a bit. Reckon I got sorta twisted. I didn't know I was comin' here.'"

"It's good you did," Sergeant Mahon's face was grim. "They don't seem to like you at the camp, you left yesterday. I can't get it all, because I understand little Cree, but you were trying to find someone, and it wasn't North Wind. They said you ran when you saw me."

Blue Pete was prepared for it. "I seen a Mountie comin', but I didn't know 'twas you, Sergeant. Yuh see, I gotta keep outa the way o' Mounties wen I'm on this job. So I vamooseed wen I seen one."

The Sergeant whispered: "Have you seen North Wind? Do you know where he is?"

"I got a good idea," replied the half-breed cautiously. "I'll tell yuh 'bout it wen I git a bit rested. Do' wanta talk 'bout it now?"

"So long as you know—and will tell me," agreed the Sergeant. "But you've been here a long time. Mountain Stream has explained some of it—as much as I can understand. You were sick—or hurt?"

Blue Pete gave a running sketch of his accidents. North Wind and Wild Flower were, in the story, merely a pair of Indians who had found him.

"Who was it shot you?"

"Dunno. Nebbe took me for a panther."

Mountain Stream, hearing their voices, had come from the other room. He stood silently waiting to join the conversation. The Sergeant invited him forward with a smile.

"Light-as-Dark is lucky," said the chief. "He is strong, or he would have frozen to death last night. He has been lucky."

so often. He glanced from the half breed to the Sergeant. "Perhaps he is not so hot as I am."

"Oh, it looks as if I'm all right," returned Blue Pete in Cree. "We've met before, I don't know why I ran away. I have many friends in so many encampments. The Mounted Police are really our friends. They—"

Mountain Stewart's confession was revealed in his puckered brow. "He's a bad lot, that's all there is to it, as you said."

"Not for this one," he declared in Mohave. "Hah! I am not so sure that the Mounted Police don't want me, but I couldn't afford to take any more."

He interpreted most of it for the Sergeant. "They like that you and Sergeant Mahon and Mahon. They're too skinned to do anything else."

The Sergeant shook his head, a kindly frown. "I see you told them the same story, but that you were running from us."

"Not really," Blue Pete protested at first. "If they took it that way, that's my fault. Anyway, turn them to Seches. They'd do the same to me any day."

He seems to think a lot of you," said Mahon. "He was badly upset when you staggered in last night."

"I'm glad you stand in well with them," observed Mahon, and I have a lot to do together, with you, and need not straight to North Wind. But I'm to go away, I'm loaded with the Indians, the detachment just left this place. As soon as you're fit we'll get after the Blackfoot and the rest of 'em. If we don't hurry, he added with a laugh, "Mistake will be after us, and that might lead to complications."

Blue Pete shook his head sorrowfully. "It's a long story, Sergeant. Don't let it now. Tomorrow night, I got pretty used up yesterday, I never thought I'd live."

Mahon saw that his had been finer. He had something on his mind, and that it was something he did not wish to speak of at the moment. It troubled him, but there was no need for haste. When Blue Pete was ready to talk was time enough. He fancied the half breed was in worse condition than he had ever seen him, and that, added to the accidents he had suffered from, had affected him rather seriously. It would not be fair to press him now for the story.

All right, Pete," he said. "Take your time, but you'll be all right in a day or two." He was not special.

Far into the night that followed Blue Pete threw aside the furs and rose. The soft floor-covering made his movements

almost soundless, and he had gathered up his guns and ammunition and was making for the door when Mountain Stream appeared suddenly in the other room. He strode to the door and, lashed his back against it. In the moonlight that entered through the window mark of the room was almost clear as day.

"Yes, I knew you planned to go again," he said. "I cannot let you. It would get me into trouble with the Mounted Police. Besides, I want you here. I know how Light-in-Dark can shoot. I know how strong he is. I know you were not so weak as you tried to make the Sergeant think. You are afraid of the Mounted Police. So am I. But I have to stay and face them. It's my job. I will pay for it."

Blue Pete's teeth clenched together. "Do you mean you are going to try to stop me?"

"If I can. Unless Light-in-Dark is the better man." He spoke without acrimony.

The half-breed had made up his mind: he was not going to be balked. The story he had promised Sergeant Mahon was not yet ready to be told. He placed his guns on the long table in the middle of the room and adted the table against the wall.

Mountain Stream, he said slowly, "is my friend. I understand. If I beat you you can tell the Mounted Police that you tried to stop me. And," he added in English, "you will earn well how the Indians to show I helped you. For I'm through this job." He changed to Cree. "I'm sorry the Mountain Stream is a strong man and a great chief. And I am not at my best."

He pointed to the door. The corners of the room remained dark.

"You will need more light. I can see in the dark, and I would not take advantage of you. Open the door."

Mountain Stream lifted the latch and drew the door wide open.

It would interest me to know if Light-in-Dark is the man I think he is. If you overcome me I will know you are. If you fail you are still my friend, but—but perhaps you will not be so important here."

For a moment Blue Pete thought he saw a solution. If he let Mountain Stream win the approaching fight the Indians would let him go. But not before Sergeant Mahon had cornered him again for his story, the story he had not yet made up. Besides, he could not see himself not doing his best.

Mountain Stream stalked to the centre of the room and

reached his long arms hanging down. There were several methods of attack open to the fisher-lad: many tricks that might succeed in breaking the fish, but there was a test of strength, and he accepted the challenge without hesitation. 'Seeyou forward!' he said to his arms.

The fisher-lad's outstretched arms came up to meet the pair before him. Their fingers locked. They were almost of the same height and the same weight, so that neither had the advantage in the ensuing test. The locked hands came together and down toward Mount Stream's knees they

fell, so that the fisher-lad's fingers found their way to the fisher-lad's knees. Mount Stream's arms were backward. He gripped his fisher-lad's hands with the strain. The breath came jerking down between the clenched teeth. For several moments the exertion effort he had his gripped them back and back his arms went. At last off balance he gave ground and jerked his hands free.

Light in Blue Peter's strong, blue eyes, he gazed.

Blue Peter had known for some time that every ounce of his strength he had all the strain of the previous day. He felt particularly tired. He knew that he was tired and the effect of the strain. It was all over. So he moved. Mount Stream's arms too strong. Must I do more to convince him that I must go.

Mount Stream stood strong too with broad legs, grim and unheated. Blue Peter slipped at him, caught his arms about the chest's waist and hugged. The latter did not however against it, but he could not free himself. Finding he brought his feet up against the fisher-lad's chest with all the power he could muster at such close quarters. For a moment Blue Peter staggered with the shock of it, but he managed to hang on, having his face against the fisher-lad's shoulder and pressing him back. He was helpless. With a groan Mount Stream's arms slipped to the floor.

He was in his first mistake. In his recovering his mind watching every movement he anticipated. Blue Peter gave him time to rest. He wanted the fisher-lad's arm. That was more important than to get away.

A noise at his back sent him looking back. A square had entered from the other room. She carried a rifle to the barrel and was ready to shoot it. Mount Stream saw her.

'Get back!' he ordered angrily. 'Go back and stay there I command.'

The squaw backed through the hanging skins, and let them drop behind her.

Blue Pete grinned. "I could not beat you both," he said.

"But Light-in-Dark has not yet beaten me," declared Mountain Stream. "We have just started. I would prefer that you had not yesterday behind you."

"It is behind me," said Blue Pete, waving a dismissing arm.

The chief advanced; his arms extended before him. Blue Pete edged along the wall. He hated what he saw; he would have to go, and he could not afford to delay it on the alarm might reach the Sergeant.

Suddenly he sprang to the attack. Seizing one of the chief's extended arms, he whirled about and sent his opponent flying over his shoulder to strike the corner of the table and he with the wood knocked out of him. He sat up, rubbing his head and his stomach.

Blue Pete waited. He could have fled, but Mountain Stream was not yet satisfied, and he would spread the alarm.

Slowly the chief rose to his feet. Almost as he did so he struck. The blow caught Blue Pete on the forehead. It jerked his head back, and a sharp pain in his neck made him fear for a moment that something had broken. The chief, seeing his advantage, came on. But Blue Pete dodged away from him until the pain was gone.

"It is not to be all strength then?" he asked.

"I must protect myself," replied the chief. "Light-in-Dark must do the same. Anything goes now."

Blue Pete grinned. He stood his ground. Mountain Stream came on. The half-breed's fist shot forward. It struck the chief's arm on the elbow joint. Blood gushed instantly. Temporarily blinded, he retreated, but Blue Pete struck again, this time at the other elbow. In that vulnerable spot the skin parted.

It was the end; the chief was helpless with the flow of blood. He straightened. He held out his hand.

"Light-in-Dark has convinced me that he is the better man. I can fight no more, for I cannot see."

Blue Pete seized his hand and led him to a bench. "Sit there. I am so sorry. It is not a bad hurt—only blood. The wounds will heal in two days. I did not wish to hurt, but I had to."

The squaw entered the room, the rifle still in her hand. At the sight of the blood she rushed at the half-breed. But

Mountain Stream had heard her, and had wiped the blood from one eye. He sprang before her and flung her back through the curtain of skins.

'This is not for you to interfere,' he snapped. Two friends who always respected each other have settled a misunderstanding. The better man won. He is still my friend. Get water and a clean cloth.' He turned to Blue Pete, 'I'll require attention for a time, then I must tell the Mounted Policeman. You will have time to get away.' He sighed. 'I'm so sorry—so sorry we cannot work together. We could do so much together.'

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE FRIEND AGAIN

BLUE PETE knew he would be followed, that Sergeant Mahon would be after him with the first daylight. The fresh snow would make his tracks only too easy to follow, and until the Indians were out in numbers on their trap-lines after the storm he would have to keep going.

What worried him most, however, was what the Sergeant would think of him. On many an occasion he had given cause for suspicion in the minds of the Mounted Police, though always he had managed to clear himself sufficiently well to remain their friend. This time it was different. Deliberately he had fled from his best friend, the friend who had come to see what had happened to him. The inference would be that he was protecting North Wind from the law, that he did not intend to help the Mounted Police.

It would make them more determined than ever to get the Blackfoot man, when Sergeant Mahon started on a trail he never stopped until he reached its end.

It hurt to think what the Sergeant would think of him, yet he had had no time to see how he could avoid it by any other step than the one he had taken. He had to have time to think. Whatever stand he finally took he would not be rushed to a decision. Now, no matter what that decision was, he would find it difficult to clear himself with the Inspector. But if he took North Wind back, or surrendered him to the Sergeant, never again would he enjoy Police work as before.

It was all so upsetting and depressing.

As he turned away, leaving the whole sort of trail that would give him a chance to throw the sergeant off, he perspired with the weight of the problems faced. Mentally and physically he was not at all fit. He had not recovered from the strain of the previous day, and the fight with Mountain Stream had taxed what remained of his physical and mental resources. He had had during the past fortnight hoped him to pass. Everything once more had managed to make him miserable.

He had no right to think of rest, and he knew he dare not seek food, or any other conveniences. What he did not think Mountain Stream would reveal the story of their fight was that Mountain would come to that sooner or later. He must be able to visit a camp, and make some enquiries.

He had worried for some time, partly to avoid the Indians, partly to find out where the best where North Wind had taken refuge, partly because to the south he might pick up traces of his wandering Indians. He knew the sergeant was experienced enough to make the marks with his snowshoes, and would be able to pick them out where the trail was well beaten. He even if Squaw set out immediately he would have a hard time to start, and to follow his tracks in the forest by night would be no small feat, and a very serious one.

By the way, he had noticed the first person entered the first camp, and was surprised to find it was a woman, and that the first camp was the last, and last but not least, he had not yet set out on their trip, and so that he was not at all happy. Shortly after that he saw a trail, and he left to be followed it.

It left him free to consider his problem. What about North Wind?

It would be such a simple solution to give North Wind up, to put an end to the problem, and return to the 3 Bar Y and Mrs. and it would win the applause and approval of Inspector Parker and the sergeant. He was now certain that Mrs. would approve when she heard the whole story. She would suggest from time to time to later.

As the hours passed another thought came into his mind. Suggesting at him, leaving him breathless, was the consciousness that now he could sympathize more fully with North Wind. He himself was being pursued. He knew something of how the Blackfoot must have felt all these months, with the difference that North Wind's life was at

stake. The Blackfoot too had a wife who loved him, a wife who would endure any privation for his sake.

He stopped to think it over. What was to prevent him throwing up the whole affair? He might return to Medicine Hat and pretend to have failed. But he could not deny that he had some sort of story to tell. He had camped near himself there with Mahon.

Ever could he have done that. It would not save North Wind. A way he would be sought. Always he would be a fugitive. fretting about Wild Flower. forced to live in seclusion, far from his friends.

Could he go to North Wind and warn him to leave the district to go and leave no trail? It was the most promising plan he could think of. but it had the same fault as the other.

One thing he knew now. that he could never hand North Wind over to the Mounted Police.

What North Wind and Wild Flower had done for him was not the deciding factor. He did not consider his own life worth protecting a murderer. The white man's laws were unyielding. because North Wind had not lived in self defence. Crimes such as that attempted by Bear Head must be punished by the law, not by those threatened by them. That was the stand Inspector Barker would take.

Perhaps. But Blue Pete had lived through too many years of being a law unto himself to be content now for anyone else to decide for him. and his decision was that North Wind had done nothing to deserve to die. and no law could make it otherwise.

He looked about with some idea of locating himself. He must get back to North Wind and tell him his decision. lighten the weight the Blackfoot and his wife had to bear. Far away. before him, and to the north west he recognized a mountain peak that he knew stood directly west of the Blackfoot's cabin and he set off directly toward it. ignoring trails cutting through the forest. climbing hills and descending into ravines. The Sergeant would surely find his trail but he must get to North Wind and tell him. Mahon would not have come far enough to find his trail until the next day. and much might happen before that. For one thing, another storm threatened.

It was a rough course he followed for he turned aside only for obstacles he could not overstep. The greenness of his

decision brooked no delay. He had come a long way and it was longer still to the hut and the hours seemed interminable.

Hurried and impatient, a disturbing question crept into his mind. Had North Wind seized the opportunity to escape? He had promised to remain, but Wild Flower and Joe Blue would be against it, they might have convinced him. If that were so, the Blackfoot would never know that the man whose life he had saved had decided not to hand him over to the law, not to betray him. A distressing thought, almost as distressing as if he had gone to the opposite conclusion. If he never saw North Wind again he would always despise him and so would Wild Flower and Joe Blue. He could not bear to think of that.

He increased his pace. He must reach the hut before they had time to take to flight. Even to remember that he had ever thought of handing the Blackfoot over made him feel mean and traitorous. There was never a danger that North Wind would kill another, he was not a killer. The one life he had taken, even with such provocation, haunted him now, though Indians took life more carelessly than did the whites.

A scene of three months before flashed before him, of an Indian crawling up a mountain side to complete a murder of a second Indian, hauling him. Of that second Indian driving the other off when Blue Peter's own life was threatened as he climbed to render help.

It was all so plain now, the second Indian was North Wind, North Wind who did not wish to be seen, North Wind, who could have shot Flying Cloud had he tried, but who was content merely to frighten him off.

On and on he raced the creek, of his snowshoes ringing through the forest. At last as it was he commenced to perspire, but it was more from anxiety than from strain. His feet seemed to lag, he could not go fast enough.

He had forgotten Sergeant Mahon, forgotten his own longing to get away from the mountains and back to his white wife. In his mind was now only North Wind and Wild Flower, waiting now in the hut for his return, shaking with dread. Trees blocked his way and he cursed them, impossible heights he skirted with flaring fury.

He had seen no sign of human life throughout the day, except the tracks in the snow. The silence commenced to

work on him. He wanted to shout. He would have welcomed even the shuddering cry of the mountain lion.

Then the smothering silence was broken by a shout. Instantly he dropped to the snow and rifle drawn looked about. He knew then that something had kicked at his brain for several moments, but he had so much else to think of. At the same time there could be no danger from one who would shout.

He crept through the snow to a thicket and raised his head to look through it.

The shout was repeated. The crack of his snowshoes must have been heard. He waited.

Over a white, forested hill not far away came North Wind, swinging along directly toward him.

The picture was still incomplete. North Wind could not be a threat, yet distinctly there was some sort of danger about. Unsatisfied, he lay snuffing and looking everywhere. Troubled, he rose to his feet.

North Wind saw him and waved. "I've been looking for you," he called in English.

"An' I'll be darned ef I wasn't lookin' fer you, North Wind," returned the half-breed eagerly. "Jes makin' fer yer hut. Hadta tell yuh suthin. I ain't fur now to the hut is it? Let's go back. I'm darn hungry. He remembered that he had had nothing to eat all day.

"I was afraid something might have happened to you," said North Wind in his own language. "You were tired when you left, and the storm had been so bad and the cold was so intense."

Blue Pete was not listening. He looked the Indian over, marvelling that he could ever have contemplated handing him to the Mounted Police. "So you came out to look for me. He rubbed an embarrassed hand over his lips. "I ain't a-setta it," he said in English. "I've looked after mahself ad mah life, leas'twaze till Maa come. Jes the same it's a darn nice o' yuh. He stopped and gulped.

North Wind misunderstood. "I know. But you have to do it, it's your duty. It would help me if you loose to death and Wild Flower and I would hate to think that had happened to you. The Mounted Police would still be after me and I won't face a lifetime of hiding. Perhaps the law—perhaps . . ."

Blue Pete stopped him with a fierce gesture. "Dang it,

‘dada think I’d give yuh up to them’ Thank I’d do a thing like that?’ He was indignant and angry.

North Wind blinced at him. “The—the Mounties are here I know. They come for me. I can’t go on hiding.”

“I’m hidin’ mahself,” said Blue Pete with a grimace. “I know how it feels. I run ‘way from Sergeant Mahon so I cud tell yuh ‘aa am’ got nothin’ to fear. I know wot I am goin’ to tell ‘em. On y yuh gotta keep ‘way from Medicine Hat, that’s all. I’ll tel ‘em yuh.” He stopped and fell into a crouch, staring about with startled eyes. ‘Nuthin’ wrong here. Get down.’ He caught North Wind’s arm and dragged at him.

A shot rang out. Blue Pete dropped and lay still without even a groan. But through his fading consciousness he heard the sound of two more shots.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SERGEANT MAHON ON THE TRAIL

SERGEANT MAHON had slept badly. He was oppressed with a feeling that everything was not right between him and Blue Pete. So that when Mountain Stream’s squaw came pounding at the door of the hut he was on his feet instantly, gun in hand. She led to the chief’s cabin, explaining nothing, but in her manner was an urgency that made him fear that the worst had happened to the half-breed.

Mountain Stream, a bandage about his forehead almost banding him, managed to get to the Sergeant a picture of what had happened, sufficient, at least, to protect himself. Mahon saw the torn eyebrows, and knew the fight had been a real one.

He knew then that, indeed, the worst had happened, but not in the form he had pictured. Blue Pete had deceived him. His disinclination to tell the story he mentioned was because he did not wish to tell it at any time. Whatever he had to tell would not be to his credit. As usual, he had done something that would worry the Inspector, and in this case it must be serious. It could only be that he had no intention of delivering North Wind to the law.

He had admitted that he knew something of North Wind & whereabouts, and the Sergeant had not pressed for the story because he thought the telling of it would be a warning to a hunter who had a great deal to say about how and how to bear. And now he had run away rather than level himself to the Sergeant's view that they should take up their hunt together.

He knew the little trap country on the chief, but little need he ask. He knew as that was necessary to know to direct his own. Blue Pete must be found. On the way to the headquarters he had noticed the fresh marks in the snow. They must be the half breed's.

Immediately he started for the daylight. He could not hope to know a trail through the forest in the night. Besides, he wished to make a careful examination of the marks left by Blue Pete's whereabouts, that he might be able to recognize them from others. Thus, he found. When he was satisfied with the examination he returned.

For a long time he compared the difficulties. In order to make sure of Blue Pete's trail, he had to be sure to go through the trees. Later on, he found it was necessary that the half breed was making an effort to go on and leave him. He expected as he was he was present. But the man he followed knew the man's tracks. He was sure of it, and he was sure he had the half breed. Thereafter he went without debate into the forest, looking back on the meeting somewhere else, and he had information. He did not think it likely the half breed was risk visiting any other camp. He would keep his eye on the mountains where he was known to meet anyone.

Tuesday, March, decided on. He was sure of it, but as the hours passed the anxiety increased. It was not so much that he might not find Blue Pete, but that before that time the half breed would have done something that would get them all into trouble.

There had been so many instances of that. In fact, in the foothills where the law was kept, something heard of from outside there were no more. The half breed had a long head. He himself was at a great stage, but he spoke little true, and he would trust no Indian for any information he might give.

Toward the middle of the afternoon he saw that he was

tiring. He had come a long way, and without food or rest, over rough country and in fresh, powdery snow. The heat of his feet through his moccasins kept forming small balls of ice between them and the gut of his snowshoes, and he was forced frequently to stop to break them away.

After a time he realized how foolishly he was acting, and he stopped to think things over. Tired now, in another couple of hours darkness would be on him, and he had nowhere to take refuge. Lack of a roof was not so threatening as spending the night in the open in the physical condition in which he found himself.

He considered turning back toward the nearest encampment. By striking a used trail he was bound to come on one before long.

He reached down to readjust the thongs, and to clear away the ice. As he did so a shot rang out to the north-west. And in its echo two more joined. Without waiting for more, he set off at top speed in the direction from which they had come.

He ran as he had never run on snowshoes before, crashing through and over shrubs, leaping logs, tearing through the trees. Several times he fell, but always he plunged to his feet and raced ahead. He was strangely excited, nervous, and he did not know why. It might have been hunters.

Somehow he knew it was not.

A fresh track left by someone on snowshoes suddenly crossed before him. So fresh was it that the disturbed snow at the edges had not yet been blown in. The tracks were joined by another. Two had been there—and close by in the snow was the indentation of a man's body, and beneath it a splash of blood.

And only one had left the place.

Puzzled and wild with excitement, he looked about. All about, for many paces, it was open so that no marks could be concealed, yet two had been there, and only one had left. The man who had fallen was being carried away. It was the story of the shots he had heard.

He did not call out. No warning of his nearness must be given. Someone had been shot.

He picked up the trail, and followed cautiously now, prepared for anything. The route the man had taken was along the easiest course, for the burden of a man's body must be great on snowshoes.

After a time he saw them. They were dropping out of sight over a crest a hundred yards ahead a lump figure hanging over the shoulder of another. He hurried after them.

"Stop!"

He was within forty yards, and he stood with raised rifle.

The Indian turned, then slowly lowered his burden to the snow and pointed.

"He is hurt -bad," he said in halting English. "He is very heavy. I will not run. We must get him to the hut."

Mahon ran forward and sank to his knees beside the half-breed. A great stain of blood stained the front of the unconscious man's sweater. Mahon rose.

"How far is it to the hut you speak of?"

The Indian pointed. "Not far. That way. He is so very heavy. I am tired. We get him there quick."

"I'll carry him now for a while," Mahon offered. "Here!" He handed his rifle over.

North Wind stared at him, then hesitatingly took the weapon. "I would have got him there somehow," he said.

In turns they carried Blue Pete, making more speed now. At intervals a groan told them the half-breed was still alive, but there was no other sign of life. The wound was not bleeding now, but much blood had been lost, and Mahon was frantic with anxiety.

Dark had fallen when they sighted the hut. It was Mahon's turn to carry, and North Wind ran ahead. There was still a ravine to cross, and from it the hut was invisible. The door was open when the sergeant staggered up to the hut. Gently he laid Blue Pete on the blankets Wild Flower had spread for him.

She pushed him roughly aside and commenced to cut away the stained sweater. Mahon, looking on, saw that she knew what she was doing, and was relieved.

The right side was torn close up under the shoulder. Wild Flower bent her head to it and nodded happily.

"It is not so bad," she said, looking up into Mahon's face. A look of fear and sadness drove her happiness away.

Mahon noticed it, but did not try to understand. He started for the door. "I will get a doctor right away."

"Where from?"

It stopped him abruptly. He passed a hand over his forehead. "I must do something."

"No doctor nearer than Edmonton," said Wild Flower.

"He would be too late. Him all right soon. Maybe long rest. I look after him."

"How can you be sure he is all right?"

"I nursed him before," said Wild Flower.

Mahon recalled what Blue Pete had told him. "You were the one who did that? He told me of it. He owes you so much already. I hope you are right about his wound." He turned to North Wind. "Who shot him?"

North Wind shrugged. "Me not know. I not see. Shot at me too."

"Yes, I heard. There were three shots. I heard them."

"I shot back. I did not try to kill. This time."

Mahon was anxiously listening. "Has he made enemies here?"

North Wind shook his head slowly. "If the Indians knew he was a braver they would be angry."

Mahon looked up sharply. "You—knew that?"

Wild Flower said, "He was here for weeks. We knew. We . . ."

"Do what you can for him. It looks as if he's coming round. As soon as he's fit I'll get him moved to a hospital."

"Three hours fast ride to railway station," said Wild Flower. "Then hours more to hospital. He get better here faster. Her eyes lifted appealingly. "Let us nurse him here till he is well. Then we go."

The Sergeant looked her over with puzzled eyes. He had never seen North Wind or Wild Flower, and in his anxiety for Blue Pete the appeal was meaningless. "You seem to like him. All right. I want you both to do your best for him. You'll be paid. I'll go and wire for a doctor."

They watched him start back through the night. It was clear, and the stars would guide him. His opinion of the Indians was changing. "Everyone either loves or hates him," he said to himself.

From behind the curtain of blankets Joe Blue Goose heard every word. Wild Flower and North Wind had barred him out of sight in time to avoid the Sergeant, for his presence would have told the whole story. When Mahon was gone he humped into the outer room.

During the night North Wind helped him to the nearest encampment, and left him there.

The snow's too deep out that way, we aren't going to cut a road for eighty miles when you can be better cared for in the Hat."

Whiskers'd git me that easy.

Whisk is Mahon laughin'—would drown in the snow out that way this year."

Blue Pete sighed. "Bet it be cald as firm as stone."

It was late March before he reached Mexico. The Hat Mira was at the station to meet him, having ridden in through the melting snow to be in him. For my own sake I put her husband was a no worse condition than was reported by the Inspector. In the face of his protests they carried him to the hospital, with Ings for his own orders not to make a baby. Then or he'd run out on them.

For more than a week the Inspector inquired questioning him, but at last his silent visits became embarrassing to both of them.

One day he plumped himself aggressively in the chair at Blue Pete's bedside. And now about North Wind, he began.

"Blue Pete had his story ready. "Dead," he said.

"Dead? Are you sure?"

"Buried him and sell out thar in the mountains."

The Inspector looked worried. He glanced about to see they had the room to themselves. "Did you shoot him?"

"Not me. Another Neche. I come on him an' buried him."

"But—but you never mentioned this, not even to Sergeant Mahon."

"I was partly near, but when the Sergeant come on me last in Mountain Stream cabin, I was feeling mighty bad, an' I was sorry for North Wind an' his squaw. She was thar too. I thought maybe the Sergeant might wa'ta drug her back an' so settin' to her an' she be do nothin'. That was why I kep' quiet. Then I got this islet an' I was talkin' much for a long time. I thought maybe if I told the Sergeant he'd think it was all over, an' he'd come an' see me thar. An' them Neches ad a kep' me thar all winter. They wanted to."

"This Indian who shot North Wind?"

"An accident. I seen it. We buried him deep so the cougars wudn' git him."

Whether Sergeant Mahon was deceived or not Blue Pete never knew. A task they had the day he left the hospital for the ranch left him more doubtful than ever.

"So you buried North Wind with your own hands," said the Sergeant. "It must have been some job in the frozen ground."

"Sure it was. But I owed him a lot, he saved mah life once."

"Did you bury Wild Flower too?"

"Blue Pete was prepared. Wild Flower? Who's he?"

"Never mind. But you told the Inspector. But never mind."

"Sergeant," said Blue Pete. "I'll tell yuh suthin'. North Wind giv me the bull story. See he died. Bear Head holered Wd. his squaw out on the prairie an' attacked her. North Wind come up in time an' sh' t him. That ain't murder."

"Probably y' are right. The Sergeant" smiled thoughtfully. "And when even a murderer saves a man's life he shouldn't be handed over to justice by the man he saved should he? Well, the Inspector lets up on his satisfaction. North Wind's name has been wiped out of our lists—officially. There are times when I'm not official."

He turned away. Whiskers, the little pinto, arched her neck toward him and he patted her.

"By the way, Pete, you haven't told me who shot you."

The half-breed shrugged and scowled. "Aint no concern o' the Mounties. He looked out over the streets from which the snow had disappeared. "I'm feelin' jes' fine now, Sergeant."

"I'd be takin' a trip some day soon an' I do want nobody to search for me. There's Neches up thar in the mountains hev' a mighty fine carcase o' mine and a coupla skins. I'm goin' back to get 'em. I won't be able to do nothin' fer the Mounties—but I'll get back."

"Going to run into some more bank robbers up that way, do you think?" smiled the Sergeant and turned and walked away.

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